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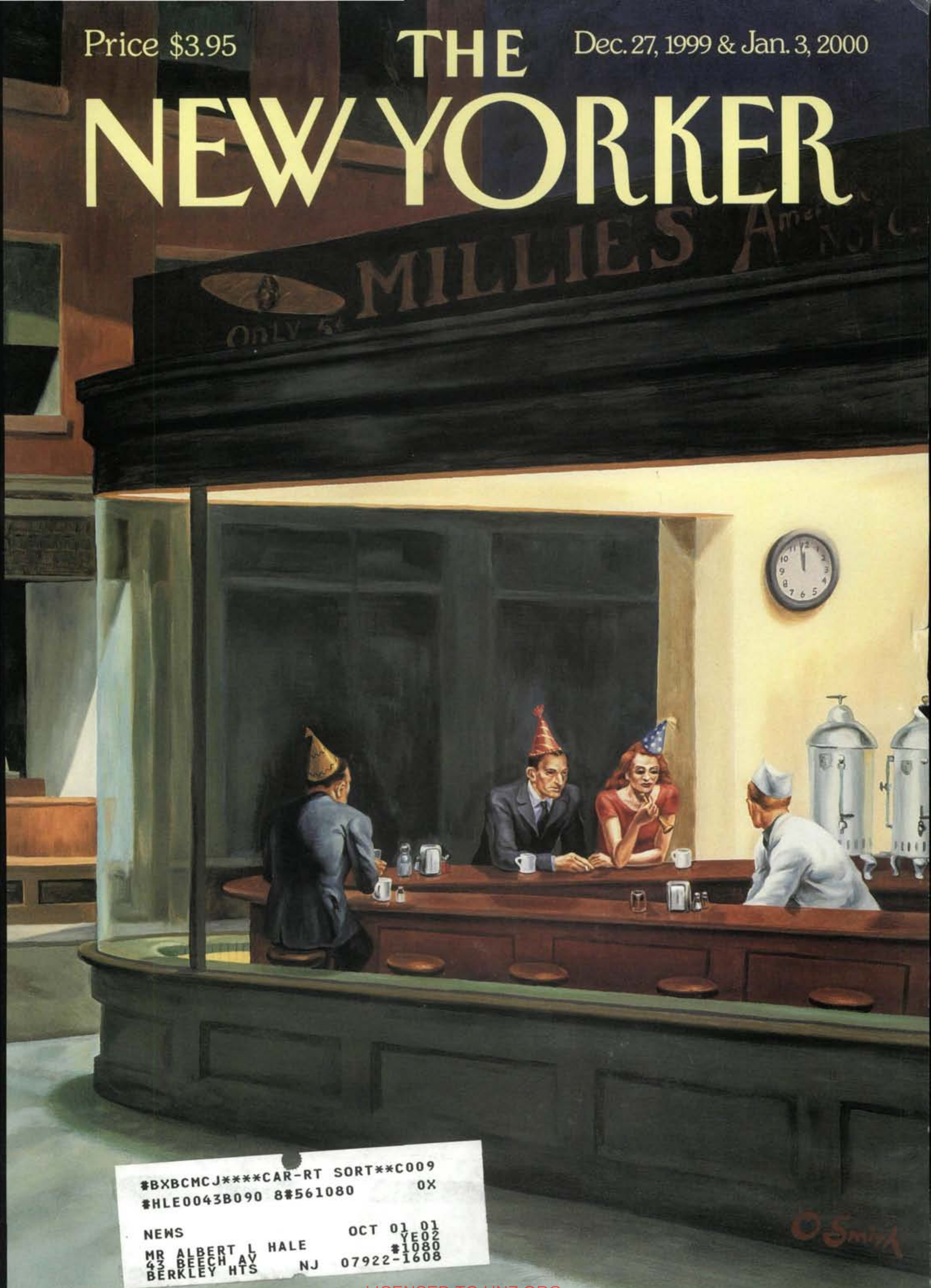

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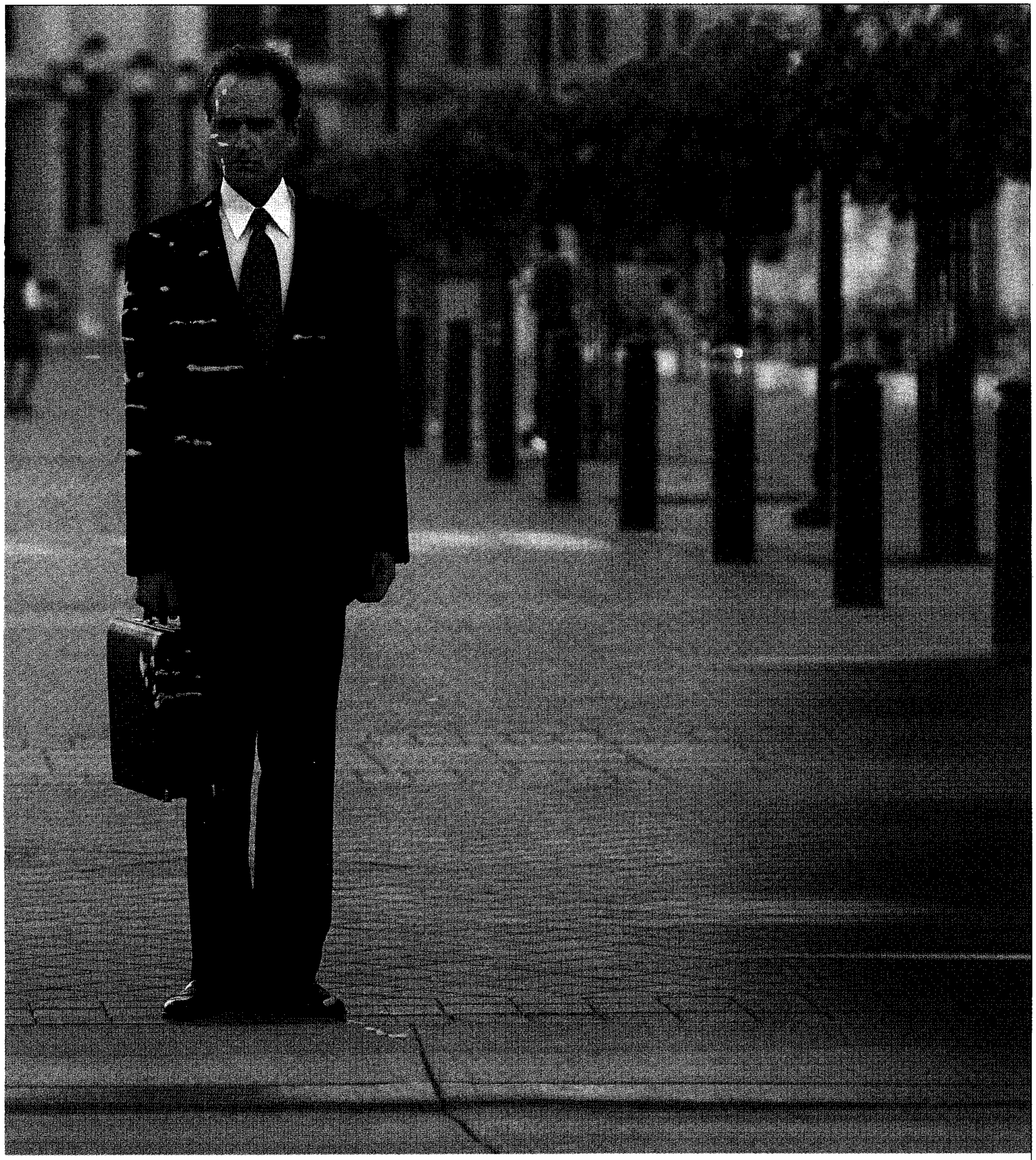

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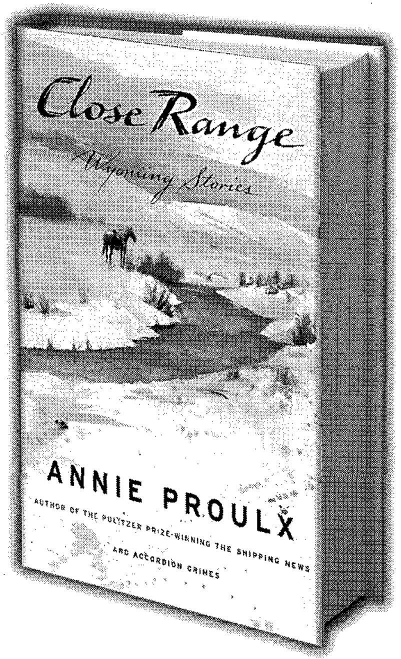
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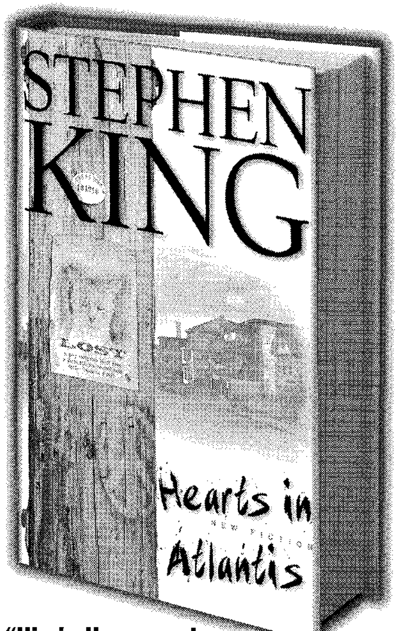

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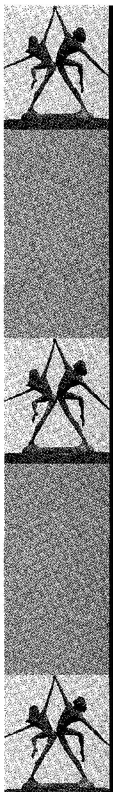

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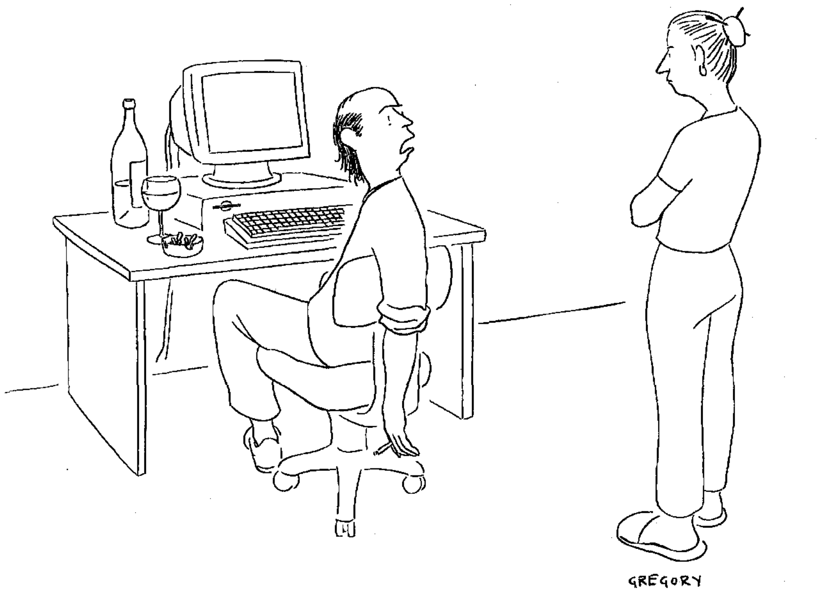

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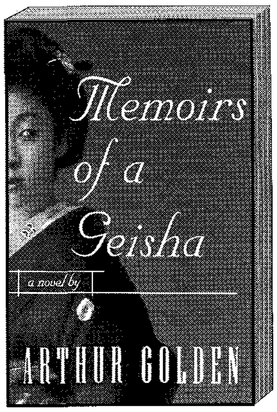
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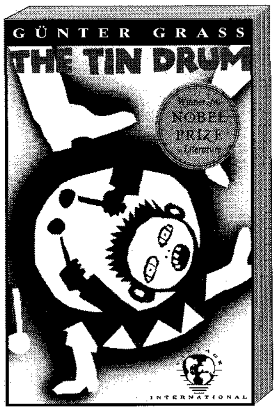
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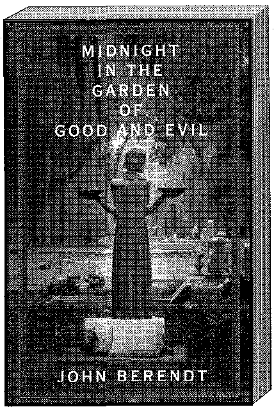
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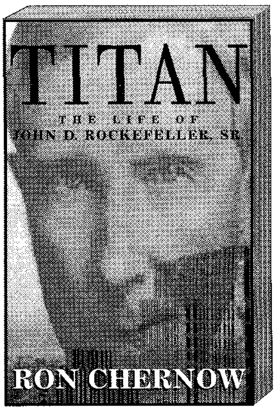
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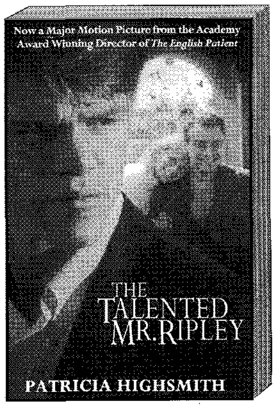
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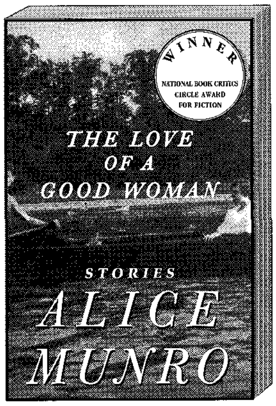
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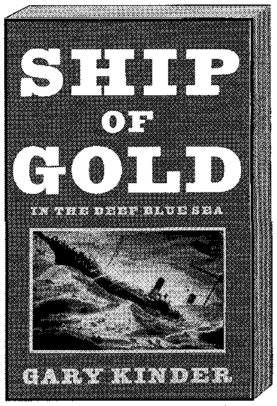
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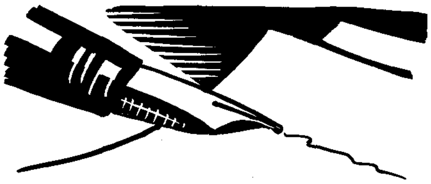

GOOD FAITH

It was instructive to see radical expressions of faith pictured by Richard Avedon (Portfolio, "Revelations," November 29th) in the same issue as John Updike's essay "The Future of Faith." Updike, despite his gray night of the soul in a (probably pretty nice) Florence hotel, dealt in what Jacob Bronowski called "the truth among us," not the truth inside us. The former is a worthy pursuit of discourse, but the latter has a boundless privacy. Why does that inner truth impel someone to flagellate himself or walk nude across India? Anyone who thinks he can answer those questions with a little easy American irony is surely insulated by the entertainment culture, with its shrewd illusions of personal aggrandizement and material paradise. Faith's inside truth is that happiness does not come from the achievement of plush conditions but from humility and gratitude and devotion—which are benefits of spiritual practice, however incomprehensible its behavioral manifestations across cultures or between people. You can't order it from room service, and you can't buy it off the Internet, so it's right that the guy with the rocks hanging from his penis wears nothing but a great big grin.

MICHAEL RYAN
Irvine, Calif.

I was once drawn to the faith of my father, a devout Lutheran, out of a sense of comfort in the familiar. But I didn't find spiritual fulfillment until, after years of trying on other religious identities, I turned to Eastern Orthodoxy. I agree with John Updike that Christianity, seen strictly as a religion and not as a political movement, seems to be fading. Could that be because many denominations have diluted sacredness out of the faith? Church services have become hug-thy-neighbor group-therapy sessions, confirmation classes bear the moniker "Deviating for Christ" in an effort to attract teenagers with "cool" language, and important religious services, like those at Easter and Christmas, include bunnies and Santas. Where is the sense of awe—even the touch of fear—of the Divine that I felt in the cathedrals of Europe or the church of my youth? God seems to have become a benign friend on whom one can call when needed, and Christianity merely a long-distance carrier to make that call. No wonder so many of us search for more.

CHRISTINA C. SHANKAR
Chestnut Ridge, N.Y.

FRIENDS OF HILLARY

After grinding my teeth through much of Gail Sheehy's "Hillary's Choice," I found Joan Acocella's critique (Books, "Shrink to Fit," December 13th) to be a right-on-target consolation. But I do want to correct Acocella's statement that I provided Sheehy with "unflattering material." I did not provide anything unflattering. There are, however, many instances in the book where complimentary information I and others shared with Sheehy was mangled by her into a bloody mess. Having been Bill Clinton's chief of staff in Arkansas, I recognized dozens of blatant and serious factual errors in just the first two hundred pages of the book (at which point I stopped reading, because I just couldn't take it anymore), so Sheehy clearly didn't concern herself with accuracy. And her baseless personal and amateur psychoanalytical opinions are just as sloppily tossed around.

BETSEY WRIGHT
Rogers, Ark.

DON'T FORGET TO VOTE: The ballot for the first annual *New Yorker* Book Awards can be found on pages 57 and 58.

•

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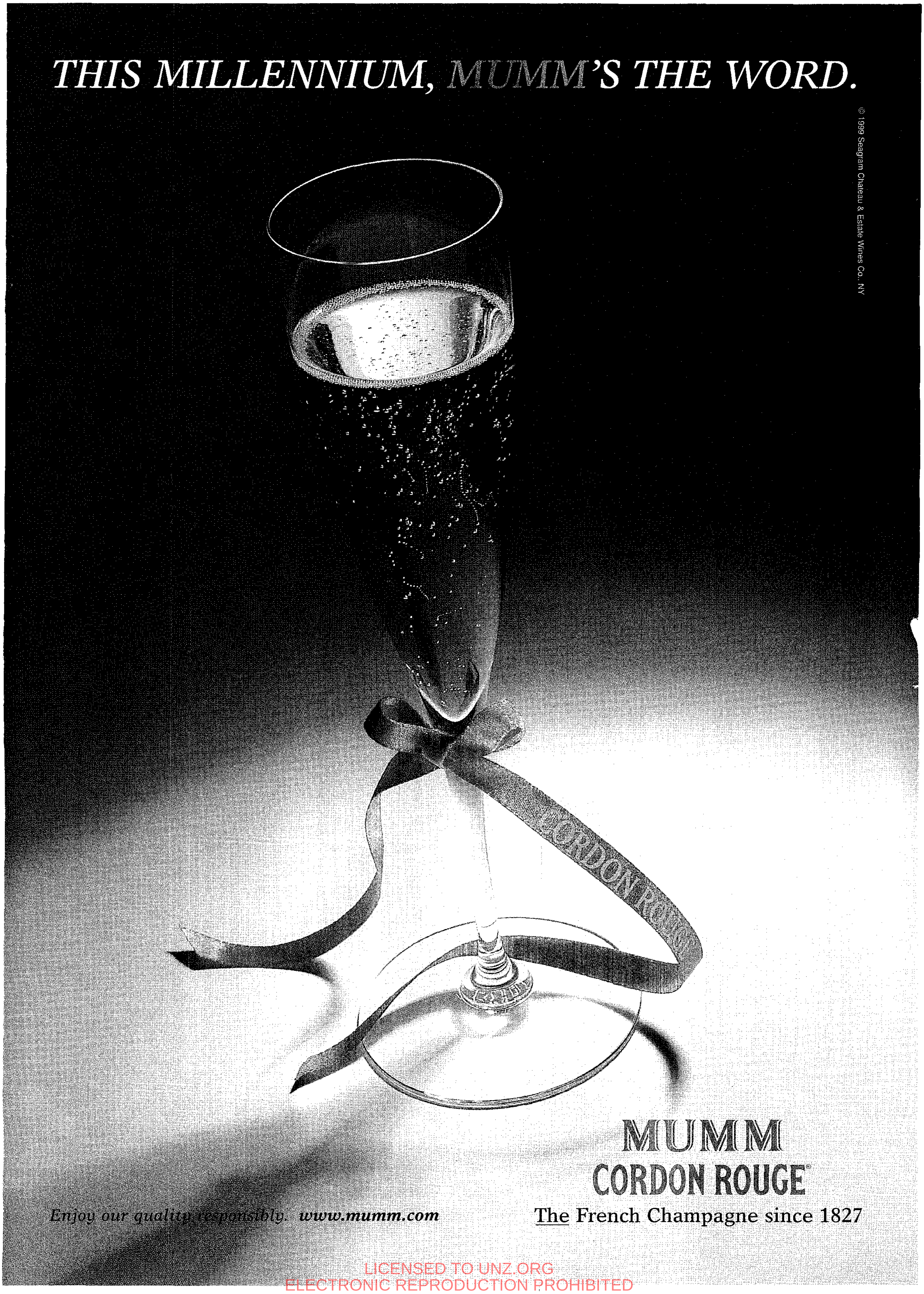
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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

Aquila Theatre Company—The British and American theatre company, in repertory performances of "King Lear" and "The Iliad: Book One." Jan. 4 at 8: "King Lear." Continues through Jan. 9. (Rose Building, Lincoln Center. 279-4200.)

Dirty Blonde—Claudia Shear ("Blown Sideways Through Life") stars in a play she wrote, about two single New Yorkers who happen to meet at the grave of Mae West. In previews. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 460-5475.)

Jackie Mason: Much Ado About Everything—The comic is back on Broadway with a new show, in which he explores the problems with Bill Gates, the Internet, Y2K, Bill and Hillary, Rudy Giuliani, and Jesse Ventura, among others. In previews through Dec. 29. Opens Dec. 30 at 8. (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Lobster Alice—A comedy by Kira Obolensky, set in mid-forties Hollywood, in which the arrival of Salvador Dali (David Patrick Kelly) inspires a creatively blocked animator (Reg Rogers) and his assistant (Jessica Hecht). In previews. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

Sexual Perversity in Chicago—The Atlantic Theatre Company's all-Mamet season continues with the playwright's 1976 comedy, accompanied by his 1976 one-act "Duck Variations." In previews. (336 W. 20th St. 645-1242.)

Wrong Mountain—A new play by David Hirson ("La Bête"), starring Ron Rifkin as a bitter unknown poet determined to demonstrate how easy it is to make it as a playwright. In previews. (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

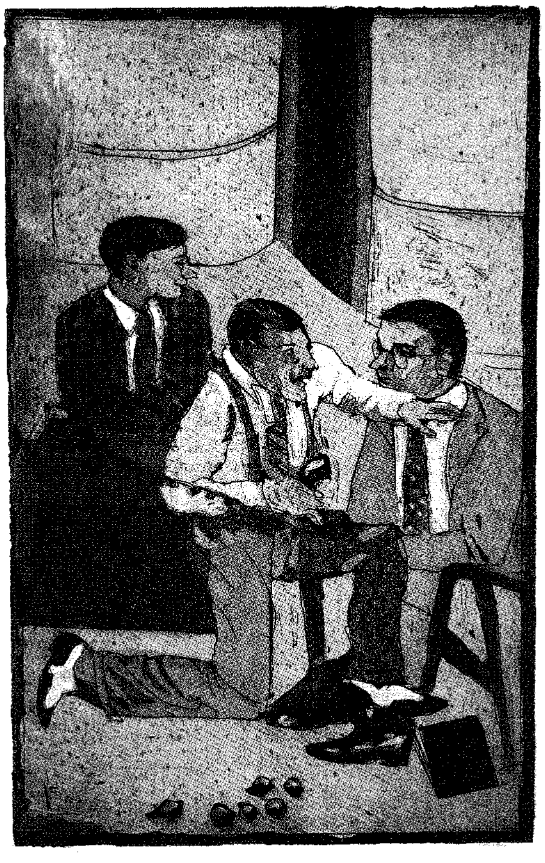
OPENED RECENTLY

Adam Baum and the Jew Movie—Ron Leibman stars as a Jewish movie mogul who hires a Gentile (Christopher Evan Welch) to write a film about anti-Semitism, in a comedy by Daniel Goldfarb. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 279-4200.)

Adobe Theatre Company—This fairy-tale satire (with an unprintably naughty title) is much more fun than it ought to be. Jeff Goode's script is cotton candy—delightful to look at, but insubstantial. Aided by Bernard Grenier's unforgettable costumes, the engaging comic cast would be right at home on any vaudeville stage, and they make the audience forget the play's lack of edge (Vin Knight, as the Storyteller, and Peter Dinklage, as the Handsome Prince, are particularly good). Beware, however: this holiday fare is only for those families who watch "South Park" unbleeped; the Fairy God-phallus, though charming, is the least of it. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 279-4200.)

Amadeus—From London, a revival of Peter Shaffer's drama, starring Michael Sheen as Mozart and David Suchet as Salieri. Sir Peter Hall is the director. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Another American: Asking & Telling—A one-man show written and performed by Marc Wolf, based on his interviews with gay and straight military personnel from the Second World War to the present. (St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 279-4200.)



Adam Lamberg, Ron Leibman, and Christopher Evan Welch, in "Adam Baum and the Jew Movie."

The Bomb-Itty of Errors—A hip-hop adaptation of Shakespeare's "The Comedy of Errors." (45 Bleecker, 45 Bleecker St., at Lafayette St. 307-4100.)

Contact—The director and choreographer Susan Stroman's dance play, co-conceived with John Weidman, is a triptych of simple stories about the various forms of human connection, the atmosphere of longing. It's a big-hearted, witty crowd-pleaser. (Reviewed in our issue of 10/18-25/99.) (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200. Closes Jan. 2.)

The Countess—Gregory Murphy's play, which tells the story of how the nineteenth-century art critic John Ruskin's wife left him for the painter John Everett Millais, is a vivid exploration of the self-indulgent pleasures of small-mindedness (in this case, Ruskin's and his parents'). The script is funny and intelligent, if a bit overlong, and the cast does a wonderful job of revealing the characters' complete inability to communicate with each other, personally or artistically. (Samuel Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 594-2826.)

Dame Edna: The Royal Tour—Former housewife turned international entertainer Dame Edna Everage (the sublime comic creation of the Australian Dadaist and dandy Barry Humphries) is, to adopt her penchant for alliteration, a virago of vitriol, a harpy of happiness, a megastar of maliciousness. (11/1/99) (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

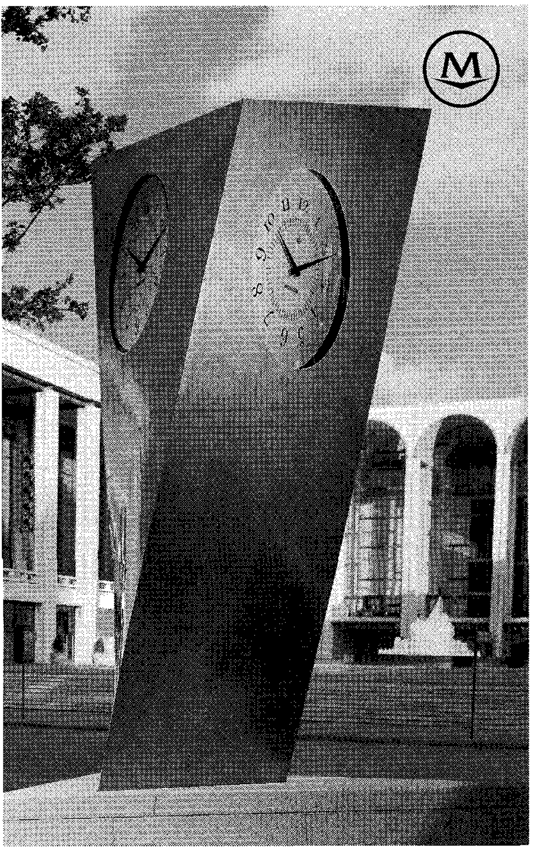
Dinner with Friends—Donald Margulies's new play concerns two upper-middle-class couples who have been married for a dozen or so years; one of them survives the wear and tear of marriage, and the other doesn't. It's an intelligent depiction of the mystery and the mundanity of marriage, and the cast give well-rounded performances. Directed by Daniel Sullivan. (Variety Arts, 110 Third Ave., at 14th St. 239-6200.)

1839—What do the Oedipus story, a monstrous black kitten, centurions in carnival masks, and a giant armadillo have in common? Not much, but they are all in GAle GAtes's new production, a big, flashy, empty piece of work which purports to bring together Greek myth and the imagined dreams of Daguerre in the year he invented the daguerreotype. The story is more about transgression than seeing, though, and after more than an hour of ill-informed dialogue and self-important frippery, even the striking *tableaux vivants* and handsome puppets aren't enough to keep the audience from twitching in a collective effort to stay seated. (37 Main St., Brooklyn. 718-522-4597.)

Elsa Edgar—A pair of monologues in which the renowned society gossip Elsa Maxwell and C.I.A. director J. Edgar Hoover provide a fascinating look at the way secrets became public currency during the early years of this century, as American culture became increasingly P.R.-addled. The often insightful and funny script is written by Bob Kingdom with Neil Bartlett; Mr. Kingdom also performs—in order—Elsa with heartbreaking lucidity, Edgar too broadly, the conclusion movingly. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052.)

Epic Proportions—A spoof of the making of a Biblical movie on location in the Arizona desert during the early thirties; it dramatizes many plagues, but no plague greater

TOP: LAURENT CILLUFFO; BOTTOM: ROBERT ANDREW PARKER



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This New Year's Eve concert promises a magical evening of music making. Anna-Sophia Mutter unveils the vitality of Bach's Violin Concerto in E and Maestro Masar probes the depths of Beethoven's joyous Ninth Symphony. For tickets call Centercharge at 212-721-6500. For additional info call 212-875-5656.

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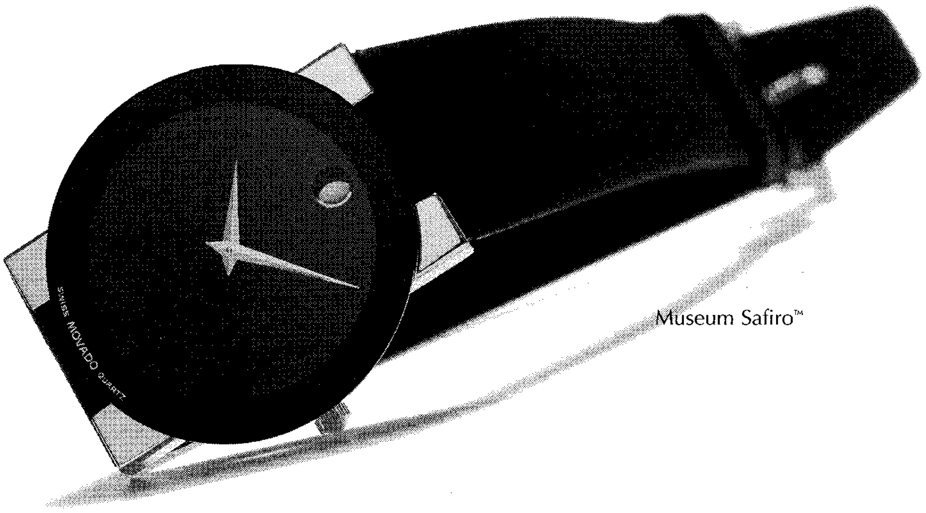

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than the one that corporate culture has visited on Broadway in the last few years. What's strange in a piece that has no ear for the moment is that it contains the pitch-perfect performance of Kristin Chenoweth, a comedienne of terrific originality and charm. (10/18-25/99) (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

The Exact Center of the Universe—An amiable comedy by Joan Vail Thorne, lightly seasoned with insight, about a classic Southern dragon-lady mother (Frances Sternhagen, in a beautiful performance). (Century Theatre, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

Fuddy Meers—The very promising playwright David Lindsay-Abaire's kitchen-sink comedy goes so over the top that you might miss the melancholy beneath the absurd chaos. In a cast of characters (played by the best comic ensemble in years) which includes a blissful amnesiac, a maimed criminal with a speech impediment, a protective mother whose stroke has rendered her Caryl Churchill cryptic, and a sweet kook who expresses his anger with a hand puppet, no one is who they seem and everyone is connected in surprising ways, and through surprising needs—the *Über*-dysfunctional family? (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes Jan. 2.)

Fully Committed—This hilarious one-man comedy, a tribute to starving actors slaving away in the restaurant "industry" in order to make ends meet, has reopened at a new theatre. Mark Setlock plays a lovable reservations clerk at an unnamed tony Manhattan restaurant, who deals with the daily deluge of calls from dying-to-be-guests. Developed by Setlock and the playwright Becky Mode. (Cherry Lane Theatre, 38 Commerce St. 239-6200.)

Ghosts—Ibsen's 1881 drama. (Century Theatre, 111 E. 15th St. 279-4200.)

Give Me Your Answer, Do!—In Brian Friel's latest drama, two Irish friends and novelists, one a commercial failure, the other a best-seller, come together with their wives (and some in-laws and a literary archivist) for a late-summer afternoon of cocktails and angst. The whole thing builds to a vaguely "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" fervor in the second act, but the performances are exhilarating, so you forgive the unnecessarily melodramatic ending. (Gramercy, 127 E. 23rd St. 777-4900. Closes Jan. 2.)

Hamlet—Liev Schreiber is the prince, in a Public Theatre staging directed by Andrei Serban. (425 Lafayette St. 239-6200. Closes Jan. 9.)

Home of the Brave—A Jewish Repertory Theatre revival of Arthur Laurents's drama, about anti-Semitism in the military during the Second World War. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 831-2000.)

If Memory Serves—Elizabeth Ashley is a fading television actress whose son (Sam Trammell) causes a scandal by making his recollections of his childhood public, in a comedy by Jonathan Tolins. Directed by Leonard Foglia. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

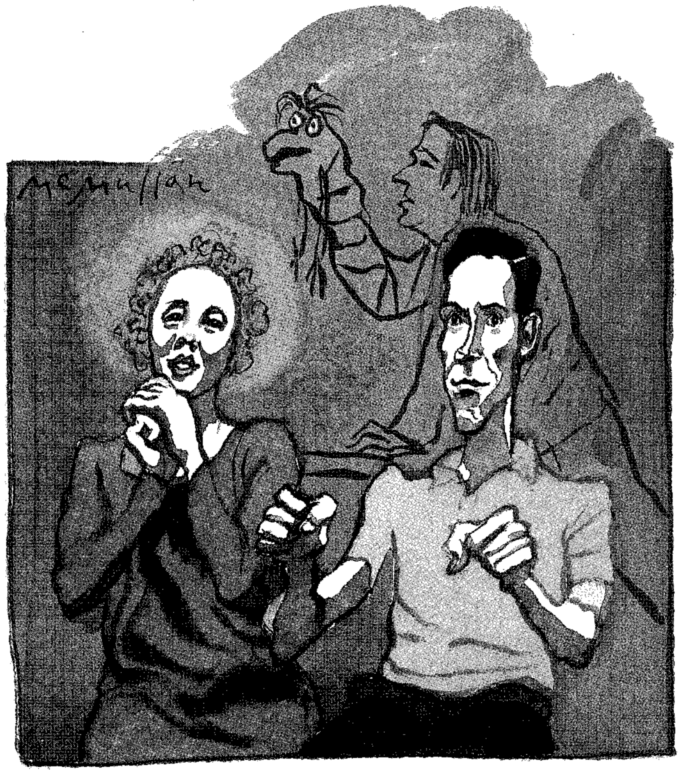
James Joyce's The Dead—Playwrights Horizons' musical version of the short story has moved to Broadway's Belasco Theatre for a limited-run encore engagement. (11/8/99) (111 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Jolson & Co.—The York Theatre Company kicks off its season with a musical about the life of Al Jolson. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 239-6200.)

Kat and the Kings—A rock-and-roll musical set in Cape Town in 1957. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200. Closes Jan. 2.)

Keep Bangin'—"Stomp" showed that you can cook up an evening of theatre out of percussion alone, but this show proves it better. The ten-man cast is led by Jared Crawford, who, with his million-toothed smile, firestorm of dreads, and rare genius, lifts the whole thing into a kind of art heaven. (Players Theatre, 115 MacDougal St. 254-5076.)

Kiss Me, Kate—Brian Stokes Mitchell and Marin Mazzie star in a revival of the Cole Porter musical, under the direction of Michael Blakemore. (11/29/99) (Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)



J. Smith-Cameron, Mark McKinney, and Robert Stanton, in David Lindsay-Abaire's "Fuddy Meers."

Marie Christine—Michael John LaChiusa's new musical, set in New Orleans in the eighteen-hundreds, starring Audra McDonald. Graciela Daniele is the director. (12/20/99) (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Maybe Baby, It's You—Love in the big city, explained with many laughs by the show's accomplished writer-performers, Charlie Shanian and Shari Simpson. There's an undercurrent of sweetness and longing that makes the evening more than a series of skits—it's what you instinctively know at thirty but wish you'd learned at twenty. Directed with a sure, light touch by Jeremy Dobrish. (Soho Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 239-6200.)

Minnelli on Minnelli—Liza sings songs made famous through the movie musicals her father, Vincente, directed. (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100. Closes Jan. 2.)

Morning, Noon and Night—A day in the life of the eccentric, obsessive monologuist Spalding Gray, removed from his natural habitat (New York City) and transplanted to an old house in Sag Harbor, where he lives in anxiety-tinged bliss with his girlfriend, stepdaughter, and two young sons. A haze of happiness hangs over the whole thing, which makes it seem a bit toothless, but Gray tells a good coming-of-age story, and his self-mocking exaggerations are actually endearing when turned on the domestic universe. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200. Closes Jan. 1.)

The Price—In Arthur Miller's 1968 play, a failed, dutiful brother, who thinks that life has given him a bad deal, cuts another bad deal, this time with a furniture dealer. But when his successful sibling turns up, the play becomes a negotiation about their family history, an agreement that can't be reached. As the rivalry is played out, the audience watches the riveting spectacle of a man clinging to a self-destructive illusion, despite all evidence to the contrary. As a metaphor for our culture of complaint, it ain't bad. And neither are the performances. "The Price" is not a waste of time, which is saying a lot on Broadway these days. (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Putting It Together—A revue celebrating the songs of Stephen Sondheim, starring Carol Burnett. Directed by Eric D. Schaeffer. (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

The Rainmaker—As wholesome and satisfying as a glass of milk, N. Richard Nash's 1954 drama is a sunny, old-fashioned valentine of a play that hits on big themes (loneliness, trust, love) with a light touch. Starbuck, played by an exuberant Woody Harrelson, is a flashy evangelist of rain who arrives at a family farm in the throes of drought and dissatisfaction; he inadvertently solves both problems with a confidence game that works out for everyone. Jayne Atkinson is wonderful as the sensible spinster who tries to resist Starbuck's charms, as are Randle Mell, as her stiff would-be suitor, and Jerry Hardin, as her well-intentioned father. A confection, a delight. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

Saturday Night Fever—The musical, based on the 1977 film. (Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

Sex—Mae West's 1926 play (which landed her in the pokey) about a savvy prostitute (Carolyn Beaumier). With music by Steven Bernstein's Sex Mob. Elyse Singer is the director. (Gershwin Hotel Living Room, 7 E. 27th St. 439-8112.)

Swing!—A musical salute to the genre, directed and choreographed by Lynne Taylor-Corbett. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Tango Argentino—An encore staging of the great 1983 dance revue. Nine pomaded couples, together with four excellent singers, tell us everything there is to know about the love that kills. The sexiest, most glamorous, most virtuosic dancing on Broadway. (Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100. Closes Jan. 9.)

Theatre of Light—A non-computer-generated light show by Rudi Stern (known for his shows in the sixties for Timothy Leary, the Doors, Joseph Chaikin, and Igor Stravinsky), accompanied by thousands of projections of hand-painted images and set to the music of Peter Gabriel, Tangerine Dream, Donovan, and DeFalla, among others. (Flea Theatre, 41 White St. 800-965-4827. Closes Jan. 7.)

Trudy Blue—The latest play from Marsha Norman ("'night, Mother") explores the pitfalls of the writer's life: a novelist finds herself almost unable to distinguish between the characters she invents and talks to all day long and her real family. It's a common theme, but superbly told in this rendition, and the simple lesson—that sometimes life is better in the real world than inside your head—is one that's all too easy to forget. Polly Draper plays the writer; Julia McIlvaine, as her thirteen-year-old daughter, steals the show with an intelligent, composed performance. Directed by Michael Sexton. (MCC, 120 W. 28th St. 727-7765. Closes Jan. 9.)

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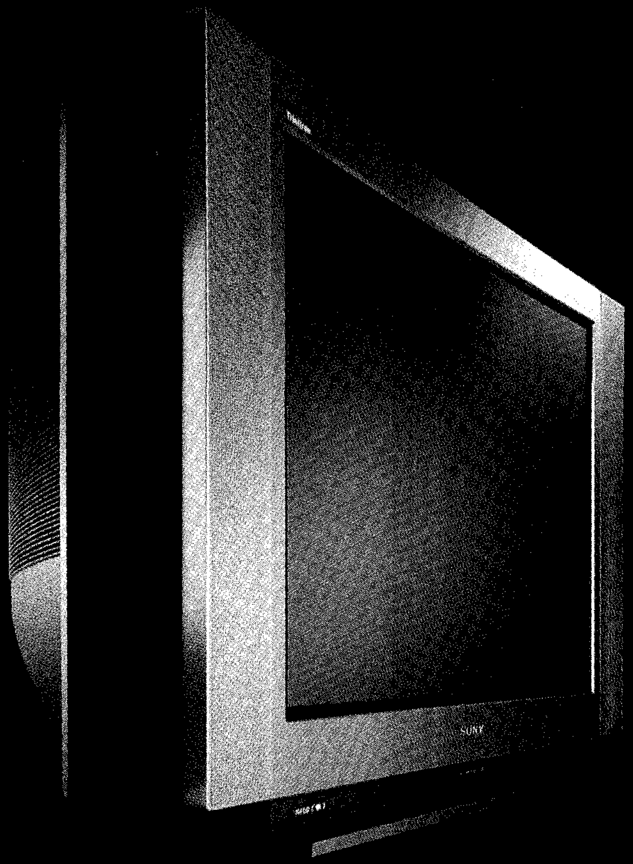

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True History and Real Adventures—Michael Mayer directs a play by Sybille Pearson, about a Scottish girl who comes to America in search of Calamity Jane. (Vineyard Theatre, 108 E. 15th St. 353-3366. Closes Jan. 2.)

Uncle Jack—The director and writer Jeff Cohen's contemporary adaptation of Chekhov's "Uncle Vanya." He manages, unlike some adaptors, to make an ever-fresh play seem newly accessible without raising the question "Why bother?" It's set on the expansive estate of a rural West Virginia family, and with the regrettable exception of Bernard K. Addison's scenery-chewing performance as the doctor, it's a sweet and rewarding experience. A charmer. (Tribeca Playhouse, 111 Reade St. 604-4195. Closes Dec. 27.)

The Vagina Monologues—Eve Ensler's one-woman show is based on interviews she conducted with two hundred women about their vaginas. There's a certain amount of shtick involved, but most of the stories she tells are touching and memorable. Often sadly so: Ensler makes you realize that when it comes to treating women and their bodies with real respect, the world still has miles to go. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

Waiting in the Wings—In the best of Noël Coward's postwar plays, old gallant theatricals duke it out in a retirement home, where they fire off some terrific one-liners. The set is too spick-and-span for musty England in the sixties, and some of director Michael Langham's casting leaves a bit to be desired. But the evening has its old-time pleasures. The play itself is somewhat creaky, but the pros who bring it to life here aren't: Bette Henritze, Elizabeth Wilson, Rosemary Harris, Dana Ivey, and the evergreen Lauren Bacall. La Bacall is just too glamorous and too famous for the faded company her character keeps; the day she goes to the retirement home is the day gallstones become jewelry. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

Y2K—James Naughton and Patricia Kalember portray an affluent New York couple whose lives are turned upside down by a computer hacker, in a drama by Arthur Kopit. (12/20/99) (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200.)

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Annie Get Your Gun: Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100. . . . **Beauty and the Beast:** Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4747. . . . **Blue Man Group/Tubes:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **Cabaret:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200. . . . **Cats:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **Chicago:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **De la Guarda:** Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 239-6200. . . . **The Fantasticks:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **Footloose:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100. . . . **Forbidden Broadway:** Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200. . . . **Fosse:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **Hedwig and the Angry Inch:** Jane Street Theatre, Hotel Riverview Ballroom, 113 Jane St. 239-6200. . . . **I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200. . . . **It Ain't Nothin' but the Blues:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200. (Closes Jan. 9.) . . . **Jekyll & Hyde:** Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **Late-Nite Catechism:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200. . . . **The Lion King:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. . . . **Les Misérables:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **Miss Saigon:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **Over the River and Through the Woods:** John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. . . . **Perfect Crime:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **The Phantom of the Opera:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **Ragtime:** Ford Center for the Performing Arts, 213 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. . . . **Rent:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000. . . . **The Scarlet Pimpernel:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100. . . . **Secrets Every Smart Traveler Should Know:** Ibis, 327 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **Smokey Joe's Café:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. . . . **Stomp:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **Tony n' Tina's Wedding:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200. . . . **Wit:** Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.

DANCE

New York City Ballet—The performances of George Balanchine's "Nutcracker" continue through the prime toy season. (New York State Theatre. 870-5570. Dec. 22, Dec. 27, and Dec. 29 at 2 and 6; Dec. 23, Dec. 28, and Dec. 30 at 6; and Dec. 26 and Jan. 2 at 1 and 5.)

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre—Dec. 22 at 2: "Streams," "Cry," "Memoria," and "Revelations." . . . ¶ Dec. 22 at 8: "Lettres d'Amour," "Bad Blood," and "The Prodigal Prince." . . . ¶ Dec. 23 at 8: "Divining," "Echo: Far from Home," and "Hymn." . . . ¶ Dec. 24 at 8: "Danger Run," "C-Sharp Street, B-Flat Avenue," and "Grace." . . . ¶ Dec. 25 at 8: "Episodes," "Bad Blood," and "Revelations." . . . ¶ Dec. 26 at 3: "Polish Pieces," "Cry," "After Eden," and "Revelations." . . . ¶ Dec. 26 at 7:30: "Fever Swamp," "Ascension," "Episodes," and "Grace." . . . ¶ Dec. 28 at 8: An evening of selected works by Alvin Ailey. . . . ¶ Dec. 29 at 2: "Polish Pieces," "Ascension," "Episodes," and "Revelations." . . . ¶ Dec. 29 at 8: "Streams," "Ascension," "Bad Blood," and "Hymn." . . . ¶ Dec. 30 at 8: "Danger Run," "C-Sharp Street, B-Flat Avenue," and "Grace." . . . ¶ Jan. 1 at 8: An evening of selected works by Alvin Ailey. . . . ¶ Jan. 2 at 3: "Danger Run," "C-Sharp Street, B-Flat Avenue," and "Grace." . . . ¶ Jan. 2 at 7:30: "Divining," "Fever Swamp," "Grace," and "Revelations." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

Eliot Feld's Ballet Tech—Dec. 21 at 8, Dec. 22-23 at 2 and 6, and Dec. 28-30 at 2: "Papillon" and "Simon Sez." . . . ¶ Dec. 26 at 2 and 6:30, Dec. 29 at 6, and Jan. 2 at 2:

"Aurora I," "The Gods Amused," "Tarantella," and "The Jig Is Up." . . . ¶ Dec. 27-28 and Dec. 30 at 6: "Simon Sez," "Apple Pie," and "The Jig Is Up." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800.)

Millennial Dance—To ring in the next thousand years, the choreographer David Parsons has arranged to have an international cast perform dances indigenous to the various countries then ringing in the New Year in their native lands. At 6 A.M. E.S.T., for example, the cast will begin performing as the millennium dawns in New Zealand; at 10 A.M., as Japan celebrates, a hundred performers will carry patterned *yogi bushi* umbrellas; at 4 P.M., Russian ballerinas will join with Kenyan tribal dancers; and so on, for a total of twenty-four hours of dance. (Times Square. Dec. 31 at 6 A.M. through Jan. 1 at 10 A.M. For more information, call 382-1083.)

NIGHT LIFE

Meat Loaf—Thanks to a few surprisingly effective film performances (in "Fight Club" he played a testicular-cancer survivor who'd developed unfortunately prominent breasts), Meat Loaf has been successfully reheated. He's trimmer than ever, and his big voice should be powerful enough to mash potatoes. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070. Dec. 27, Dec. 29, Dec. 31, and Jan. 1, all at 8.)

Barenaked Ladies—Five fully clothed Canadian guys, actually, who bring a blast of wit and warmth from north of the border. (Nassau Coliseum. 516-794-9300. Dec. 30 at 8.)

Billy Joel—Now that the other big millennial blowout (featuring Sting, Andrea Bocelli, and Joan Rivers) has been cancelled due to tepid ticket sales ($2,500 for that?), the piano man from Long Island has the big-city New Year's gig to himself. And it's fitting: Joel has always been a prideful home-town boy. His local shows have a prodigal-son intensity, and when he sings "New York State of Mind" in the fading moments of the century, don't be surprised if you get goose bumps. (Madison Square Garden. 465-6000. Dec. 31 at 9.)

CLUBS

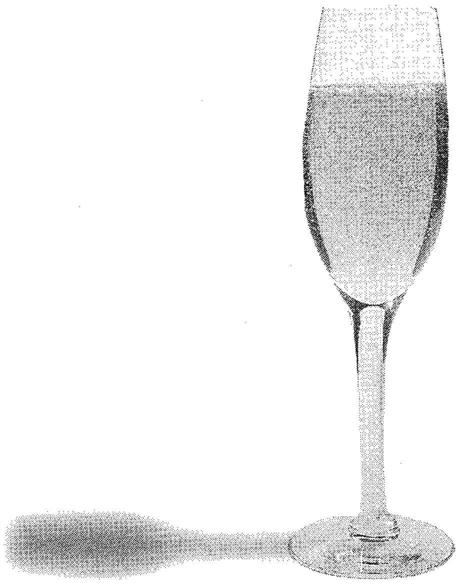
(Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

Arlene Grocery, 95 Stanton St., between Ludlow and Orchard Sts. (358-1633)—A narrow, dimly lit renovated bodega that's the ideal environment for three to five unknown bands a night struggling their way out of obscurity. Dec. 22: The quartet **JOHNNY SOCIETY** churns out nifty little pop songs, and lead singer and songwriter Kenny Siegal delivers each line with raw intensity. Dec. 27: Singer-songwriter **MARK GEARY.**

Bottom Line, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Dec. 30-Jan. 1: Singer-songwriter **MICHELLE SHOCKED** and her band the Philosopher Kings. Shocked's style has varied greatly over the past thirteen years, encompassing everything from folk to swing to gospel, so there's no telling what's in store. This much is known, though: Shocked is a hell of a live performer, and she's recently returned from a trip with Hothouse Flowers guitarist Fiachna O'Braonain (who's in her band, along with a gospel keyboardist from her Los Angeles church) to Dublin, Ireland, where she wrote fifteen new songs in fifteen days. Jan. 3: Former Traffic guitarist **DAVE MASON.**

Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Dec. 30-31: **PATTI SMITH,** the pioneering poet of punk, closes out the twentieth century.

The Campbell Apartment, 15 Vanderbilt Ave. (953-0409)—One part history, one part fantasy, this beautiful lounge tucked away inside the newly restored Grand Central Terminal is as smooth as a perfect Manhattan. The space—with twenty-five-foot-high



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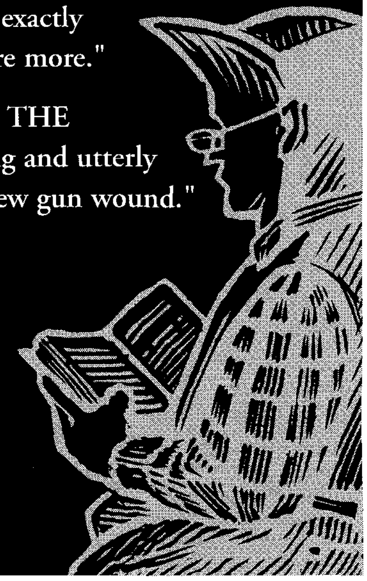

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faux-wood-beamed ceilings, stained-glass windows, and stone walls—was leased in 1923 by a financial executive named John W. Campbell, who used it as a private office where he reportedly entertained friends. The current owners restored the room and added a bar, a pool table, and plush chairs. Each evening a crush of office workers stops by, hoping to reclaim a little of New York's faded glamour. If you visit during a less crowded time, such as after a show, you might just succeed.

IRVING PLAZA, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Dec. 30-31: **MACEO PARKER** honed his chops working with James Brown in the sixties and Parliament-Funkadelic in the seventies. In between those earth-shaking gigs, the tenor saxophonist found some funk of his own—namely, Maceo & All the King's Men—establishing his impeccable prowess as a bandleader. Live, all that experience packs a powerful punch.... ¶ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday, with sets from eight until midnight. For information on the society, call 696-9737.

KNITTING FACTORY, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Dec. 22: **YOSI PIAMENTA,** the incendiary guitarist known as the Hasidic Hendrix. Dec. 31: **ELLIOTT SMITH.** After the winsome and unadorned songs he contributed to the soundtrack of "Good Will Hunting" earned him a surprise Academy Award nomination, Smith found his work scrutinized in the sort of prime-time glare that's too strong for his miniaturist sensibility. Now, after the hype has faded, he returns to intimate clubs, where his gift for small-gestured pop songs is decidedly cinematic.

MAKOR, 35 W. 67th St. (601-1000)—Dec. 22: The members of the San Francisco-based **TIN HAT TRIO** play the viola, accordion, toy piano, guitar, mandolin, and Dobro, among other instruments. The result is a kind of alternative chamber music, mixing classical influences, jazz progressions, and Old World rhythms. Jan. 4: Singer-songwriter **LUCY KAPLANSKY.**

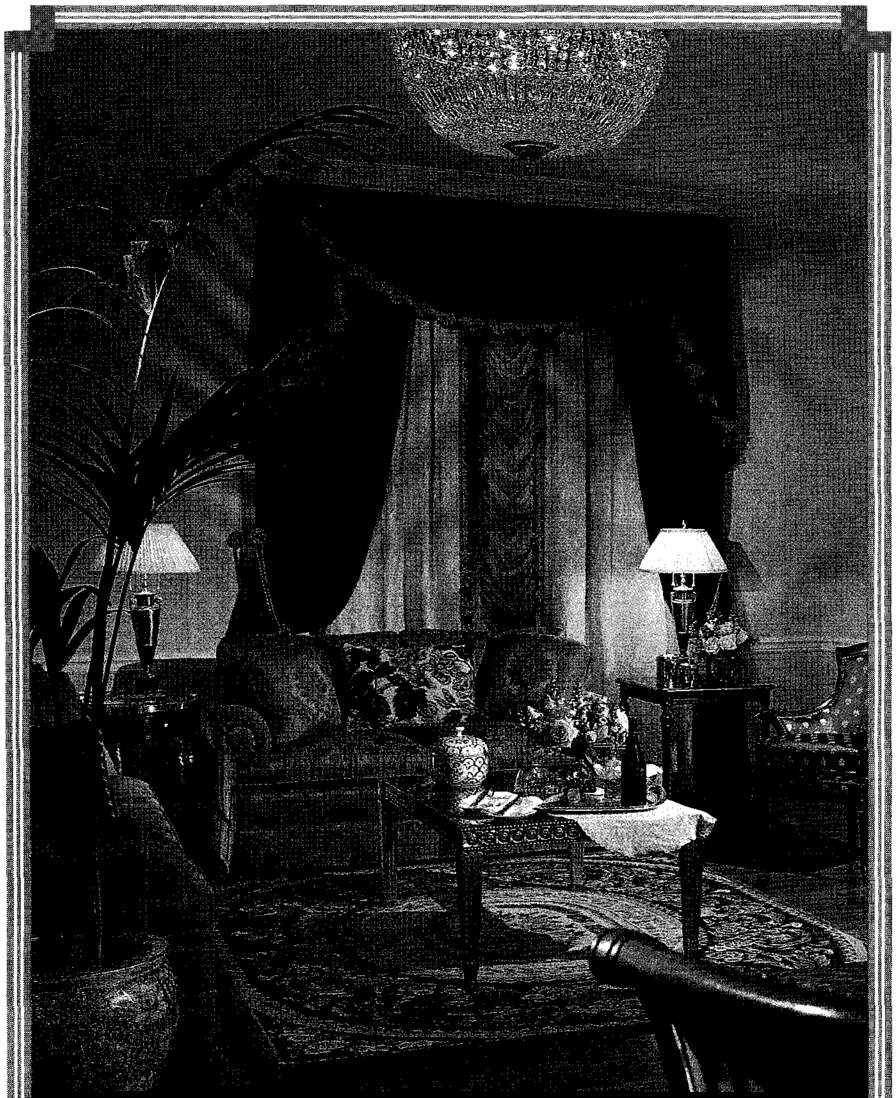
MAXWELL'S, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-0406)—Dec. 30: **ELLIOTT SMITH** (see the Knitting Factory). Dec. 31: **YO LA TENGO,** the best thing to come out of Hoboken since Francis Albert Sinatra and the split-fingered fastball. There should be a preview of the band's recently completed studio album, "And Then Nothing Turned Itself Inside-Out" (due out in February), a few long-lost covers, and a lot of root, root, rooting for the home team from the appreciative crowd.

WETLANDS, 161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—Dec. 21-23: The bluejeans-and-tie-dye sound of **GOD STREET WINE.** Dec. 29-31: **DEEP BANANA BLACKOUT** lays on the funk. Jan. 2: Led by the British-born New York City transplant Robert Hingley, in the early eighties the revivalist ska band **THE TOASTERS** helped awaken American kids to the music that was popular in Jamaica before reggae. The up-tempo, horn-driven genre traces its lineage back to early New Orleans R. & B., and there's a story that reggae was invented one steamy summer during the sixties when it was too hot for fast dancing. This is the middle of the winter, and the Toasters will not be slowing down.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND, 315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—Dec. 31-Jan. 1: The **JOE LOVANO** quartet. The monster modernist Lovano is a magisterial saxophonist and an assured and daring bandleader. Fans long ago gave up trying to discern a logical career path in his peripatetic ways. It's as simple as this: if you love his music, you follow where he leads—he rarely disappoints. Dining.

CARLYLE HOTEL, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, through New Year's Eve, the great **BOBBY SHORT.** Time has not diminished the tasteful virtuosity of Short's ivory-tinkling, nor has it taken the edge off his gregarious wit as a



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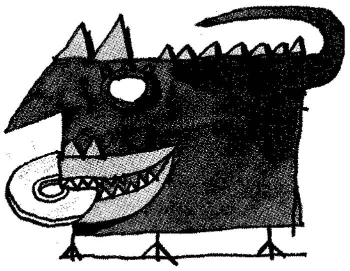
OUR HIT LIST

Twelve favorites from our 1999 CD rotation.

"In Spite of Ourselves," John Prine (Oh Boy Records)—Prine, one of our premier songwriters, has put down his pen (although he wrote the title song) and recorded a delightful collection of obscure country love songs, dealing with, as Prine puts it, "meetin', cheatin', and retreatin'." On all but one track he's joined by his favorite female singers, including Iris DeMent, Dolores Keane, and Emmylou Harris. The duets limn the ups and downs of romance much the same way that faded pictures in a photo album can recall the bittersweet pleasures of past affairs.

"The Soft Bulletin," The Flaming Lips (Warner Brothers)—This gleaming oddball masterpiece by Oklahoma City's weirdest exports proves that it's still OK to make a ridiculously ambitious rock record. Following 1997's "Zaireeka," a surround-sound experiment meant to be played on four CDs simultaneously, "The Soft Bulletin" harnesses singer-songwriter Wayne Coyne's visionary daydreams to a gorgeously mind-blowing—and eminently accessible—summation of classic rock: symphonic excess becomes a perfect foil for Coyne's disarmingly left-field odes to sci-fi, flying insects, and love.



DAVID MILLER

"Central Reservation," Beth Orton (Arista)—This twenty-nine-year-old English songwriter's sophomore release dispenses with the heavy production of her stunning 1996 United States début, "Trailer Park," and the result is one of the most emotional and haunting albums of the year. Orton's sweet and aching voice stretches her lyrics to the point where, when she sings lines such as "Please excuse me, I just need to be outside / I'm only looking for air to breathe," you nearly gasp along with her.

"The Fragile," Nine Inch Nails (Nothing)—Five years in the making, and more than a hundred minutes long, this massive electroshock opus is the kind of record that used to come in a triple gatefold with book-length liner notes and a poster. Assaultive, angst-infused, and often infantile, Trent Reznor has finally proven that machine music can make for nakedly human rock and roll. "Underneath it all / We feel so small," he sings on "The Way Out Is Through." But surrounded by roiling synths and cataclysmic drums, it's hard to recall any album ever feeling bigger.

"Summer Teeth," Wilco (Reprise)—After last year's outstanding Woody Guthrie tribute (a collaboration with Billy Bragg), the members of Wilco could have taken it easy; instead, they went and recorded one of the year's smartest pop records. Singer-songwriter Jeff Tweedy has tweaked the band's roots-rock sound to encompass a broad range of pop influences (Brian Wilson, the Beatles) while maintaining its Replacements-like wild stomp. Tweedy can craft a sharp lyric ("The ashtray says / You were up all night"), and his gift for a catchy chorus or a knowing aside is in top form.

"Sister & Brother," Melky Sedeck (MCA)—The début album by the younger sister and brother of Fugees founder Wyclef Jean rockets soul and R. & B. into the future. Melky's voice has more range than the Mars Polar Lander (and is a hundred per cent more reliable), and Sedeck is a master of the grand piano, bass, and the other instruments on the album. From an inspired cover of the classic "To Sir, with Love" to the hopeful ballad "Paradise," the duo creates a bright, celestial soundscape.

"400 Degreez," Juvenile (Universal)—He's not the roughest or toughest of rappers (right now that's probably DMX), but he's one of the youngest and most interesting. Juvenile's voice—a gravelly Creole drawl—is responsible for this year's big booty single, "Back That Azz Up," and the album it's on, produced by Manny Fresh, is a groundbreaker. Juvenile and Fresh form a perfect partnership, each showing his best but never overwhelming the other's considerable talent. Juvenile's gold-toothed raps burst from the mix all dark and shady, while Fresh's house beats and samples are surprisingly close to an ambient drum-and-bass sound that's rare in hip-hop.

"Chrominance Decoder," April March (Ideal/Mammoth)—On this romping salute to French pop, April March, the alter ego of painter and animator Elinor Blake ("The Ren & Stimpy Show"), creates an irresistible cartoon of Francophilia. With her gamine looks and sunny, vibratoless voice, March—who plays pixie and *belle de jour* with equal aplomb—could provoke Françoise Hardy to *jalousie*. "Chrominance Decoder" stacks up against the sixties *yé-yé* it emulates, while the sonic wizardry of the producer, composer and arranger Bertrand Burgalat, makes this tribute undeniably modern.

"Up a Tree," Looper (Sub Pop)—Homespun lo-fi electronica from Belle & Sebastian bassist Stuart David, his artist wife, Karn, and his brother, guitarist Ronnie Black. Stuart sings and speaks with a soft Scottish lilt over bits of static, cackling children, clicking typewriters, and other found sounds. Listening to the album brings back lost summers of youth—the same crazed hopefulness and fear that accompany a first kiss.

"Play," Moby (V2)—This bald Christian vegan uses archival Southern spiritual vocals, percussive boogie-woogie piano, and cinematic strings in ways so pulse-quickening that his latest album could replace those adrenaline syringes that paramedics carry. From the joyous roar of "Honey" to the sweet soul of "Find My Baby," this broadly appealing disk leads electronic music out of the twin ghettos of mind-numbing dance beats and blippy science-fair-project sounds.

"The Battle of Los Angeles," Rage Against the Machine (Sony)—Once dismissed as agit-prop undergrads with a fiery backbeat, this four-piece rock-and-rap guerrilla squad has spent the past half-decade tightening itself into expert practitioners of the popular genre known as agro-rock. "Los Angeles" is a seditious masterpiece: a revolutionary fusion of Abbie Hoffman and Chuck D that's perfect for moshing and plagiarizing for term papers on oppression. The kids love it because it works—after all, what is rock meant to be if not rebellious aggression in lyrical form? Adults should pick it up to remember what it felt like to vent one's anger with abandon.

"Whereabouts," Ron Sexsmith (Interscope)—Nothing could be less fashionable than the folk-infused rock of this sad-sack Canadian singer-songwriter. Sexsmith, a tune-over-technique craftsman in the mold of Freedy Johnston and Lucinda Williams, has few vocal gifts to speak of and no crack band to provide ballast behind his skeletal guitar. But he does possess a preternatural talent for sweet and winsome songwriting—which is why he records for a label filled with pugnacious hipster acts. The tracks on this album are either low-country laments or mid-tempo lullabies—minimalist heartbreakers all.

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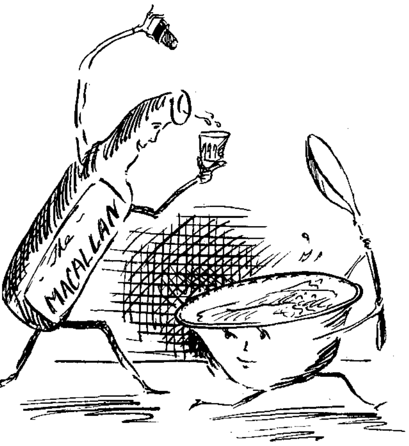

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singer and showman. A fixture at the Carlyle, he can still spin an Ira Gershwin lyric with all the sophistication, humor, and pathos it deserves. His current de-lightful, de-lovely program revels in the work of—who else?—Cole Porter. The sultry vocalist **EARTHA KITT** joins Short on the final night of the year. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, **BARBARA CARROLL** is in attendance through Jan. 1.

IRIDIUM, 48 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through Dec. 26: The **CHICO O'FARRILL BIG BAND.** Arranger and bandleader O'Farrill, one of the grand architects of Afro-Cuban jazz, has made one of the most welcome comebacks of the late nineties. His balance of steaming Latin rhythms, fervid bop improvisation, and resonant horn charts is still as bracing as ever. Dec. 28-Jan. 2: Vocalist **ANGELA BOFILL.** Mondays belong to electric-guitar innovator **LES PAUL.**

JAZZ STANDARD, 116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—Through Dec. 24: The **JIMMY HEATH** quartet. To watch saxophonist Heath at work is to observe the mind-body split in action: while standing stock still, his face an inscrutable mask, he extracts gorgeous melodies and heartbreaking tones from his horns. Dec. 29-Jan. 2: Jazz doesn't want for master pianists, but there's only one **TOMMY FLANAGAN.** Tone, touch, taste, technique—he's got it all. But Flanagan's also a poet, which is the key to his omnipotence. His spontaneous inventions have the formal perfection of written melodies and his choruses startle you with their beauty, leaving you spoiled for any other pianist. With Flanagan's imaginative repertoire and the almost alarming unity of his trio, it doesn't get any better.

KNITTING FACTORY, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Dec. 22: The master clarinettist **ANDY STATMAN** plays bluegrass and Eastern European soul music with equal aplomb. Long before klezmer was hip, Statman was reaching back to the shtetl with his mournful horn and pushing forward to the New World with his mandolin fusions. Dec. 23: Boston's best-kept secret is slipping out of the bag as saxophonist **GEORGE GARZONE,** a respected teacher and daredevil improviser, is putting in more frequent appearances here. Dec. 25: Pianist **URI CAINE** interprets the music of Gustav Mahler with a band that includes drummer **JIM BLACK** and violinist **MARK FELDMAN.** Roll over, Beethoven, and tell anyone who'll listen the news. Dec. 25-26: **KLEZMOKUM,** an American-Dutch klezmer-jazz outfit from Amsterdam. Dec. 27: Trombonist **WYCLIFFE GORDON,** who was a regular in Wynton Marsalis's former band, maintains reverence for both his Southern roots and the hallowed place his instrument holds in the jazz tradition. He's grown as a stylist and composer, and he's now confidently stepping out of his mentor's shadow. Dec. 28: The **REGGIE WORKMAN** group. Bassist Workman may be famous for his stints with Blakey and Coltrane, but his own music has moved far beyond the stylistic parameters of either former leader. A demi-icon from the nineteen-sixties, Workman has kept his ears wide open and receptive to the more formal elements of new jazz.

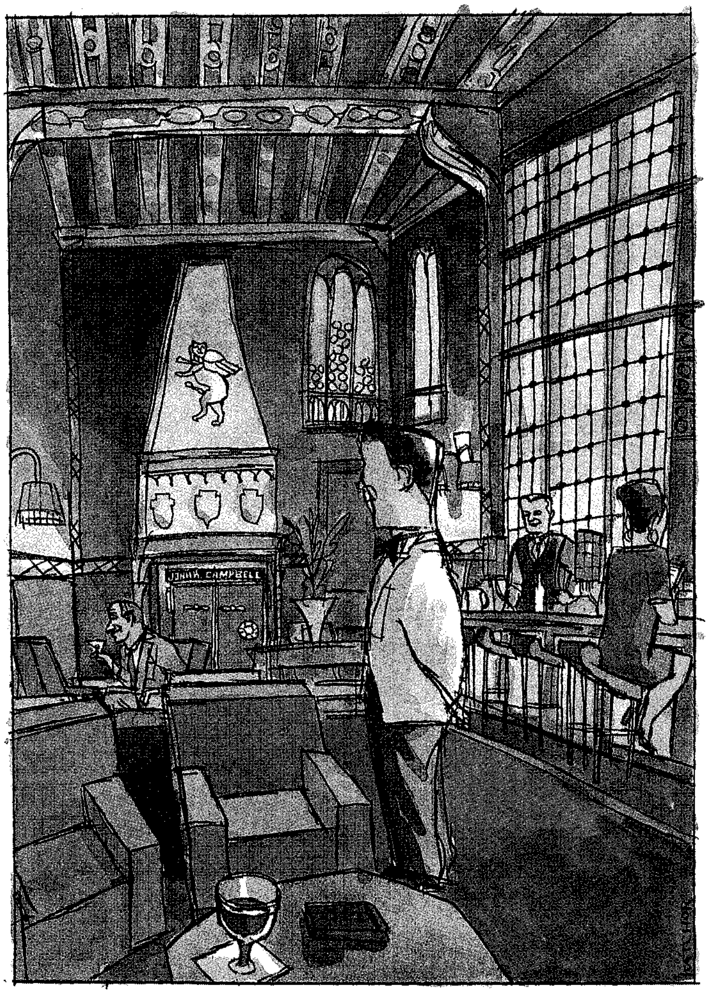
RED BLAZER, 32 W. 37th St. (947-6428)—Dec. 23: **STAN RUBIN'S BIG BAND,** featuring vocalist **CARY HOFFMAN,** offers a program of songs made famous by Frank Sinatra.

S.O.B.'S, 204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—Dec. 27: **TITO PUENTE.** The timbales king was there when Latin music gained a foothold on the American consciousness back in the late forties, he stuck by it through the lean years, and, with the music's resurgence, he's still here, whipping dancers into a frenzy and driving concert audiences into the aisles to boogie.

SWEET BASIL, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—Through Dec. 26: **SIR ROLAND HANNA.** One of the giants of Detroit's fertile piano delta, Hanna is an Ellington scholar, a crackerjack blues player, and a knight of the Liberian government. An open-armed stylist who can be as fastidious as he is funky, Hanna remains delightfully beyond categorization. Dec. 28-Jan. 2: **CHICO FREEMAN,** a multi-instrumentalist who concentrates on the tenor sax, is making a very graceful transition from youthful avant-gardist to middle-aged classicist. With his complete command of the horn, Freeman can now move in any direction he pleases—the ultimate freedom.

UP OVER JAZZ CAFE, 351 Flatbush Ave., at Seventh Ave., Brooklyn (718-398-5413)—Dec. 31: The **JAMES SPAULDING** quartet. Spaulding, a ubiquitous presence on alto saxophone and flute during the sixties, may have smoothed out a few of the edges that made his playing so, well, edgy back then, but his taste for heated improvisation remains.

VILLAGE VANGUARD, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Dec. 26: The **CEDAR WALTON** quartet, featuring drummer **BILLY HIGGINS.** Dec. 28-Jan 2: **DR. MICHAEL WHITE'S ORIGINAL LIBERTY JAZZ BAND.** Let purists debate the validity of this outfit's approach to the music of Armstrong, Morton, and Dodds: White's band positively revels in collective improvisation, counterpoint, and the two-beat stomp. Its glee turns history into something vividly sensual. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** holds sway on Mondays.



The Campbell Apartment, at Grand Central Terminal.

BEN KATCHOR

ART

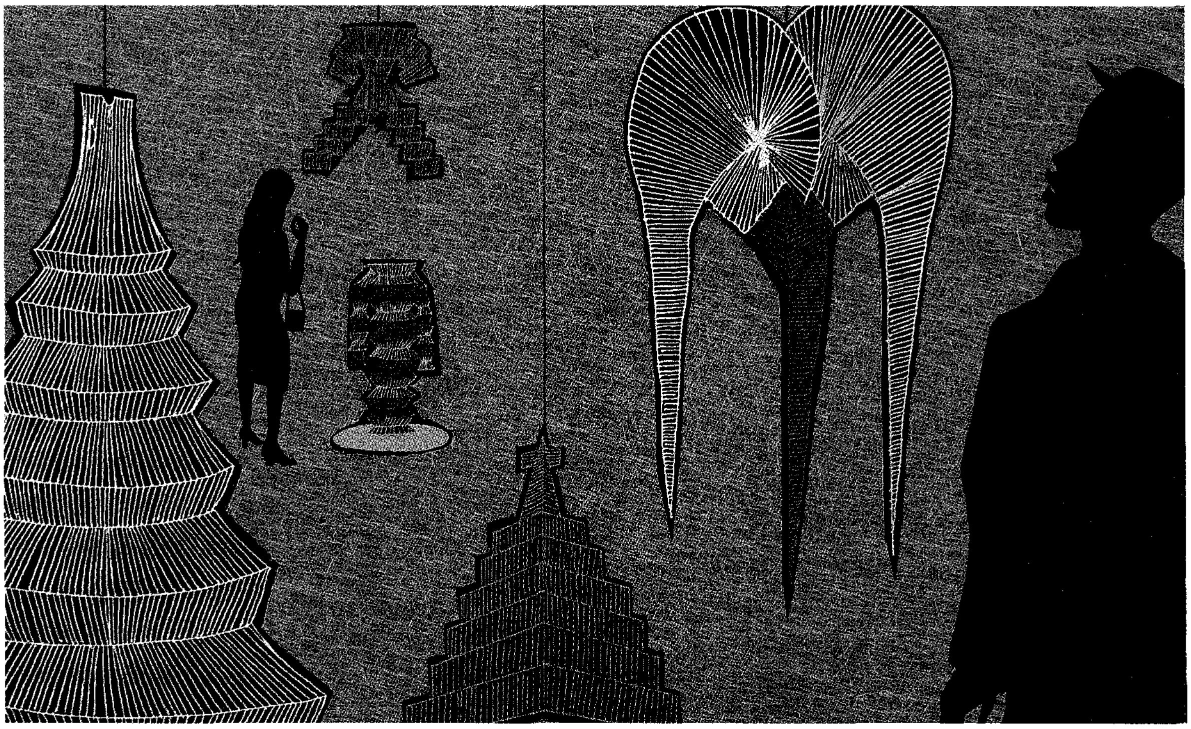
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—From Elvis Presley's gold lamé suit, visibly worn at the knees, to the varied sartorial inspirations of Mick, Cher, Diana Ross, and Bono, "Rock Style" at the Costume Institute offers an adulatory MTV-style walk down memory lane. Among the most notable outfits is the magnificently weird jumpsuit of quilted vinyl worn by David Bowie for his "Ziggy Stardust" tour. Designed by Kansai Yamamoto but clearly inspired by early Frank Stella, it's a sort of theatrically hermaphroditic incarnation of sixties Minimalism. Other highlights include dresses made from turquoise ostrich feathers (Cher) and razor blades (Deborah Harry), along with Madonna's ever-provocative pinnacled bodices. After so much spectacle and opulence, the real shocker here is a mannequin dressed, in retail flannel and black denim, as Bruce Springsteen. Through March 19. . . . ¶ "Portraits by Ingres: Image of an Epoch" offers forty paintings and ninety-two drawings of the nineteenth-century French élite. Through Jan. 2. . . . ¶ "Carleton Watkins: The Art of Perception" presents more than a hundred and twenty-five images by this pioneer of photography, who recorded the vastness of the American West. Through Jan. 9. . . . ¶ "Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids," a sombre and ravishing survey of five hundred years of the millennia of Egyptian dynasties, covers the Old Kingdom (2650-2150 B.C.), the glorious formative period of Pharaonic art when the great pyramids were built and religious statuary rose to a refined naturalism. Through Jan. 9. . . . ¶ "Only the Best: Masterpieces of the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon" is home to eighty works, including paintings by Rubens, Fragonard, Turner, and Manet, while their permanent residence undergoes renovation. Through Feb. 27. . . . ¶ "Daido Moriyama: Hunter," an exhibition of forty photographs made in postwar Japan. Through Jan. 2. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—"Modern Starts" comprises three shows featuring works drawn from MOMA's permanent collection, all focussed on the years 1880-1920. "People" runs through Feb. 1; "Places" and "Things" through March 14. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—A retrospective devoted to the Neapolitan painter Francesco Clemente presents more than two hundred paintings, frescoes, watercolors, pastels, sculptures, illustrations, and collaborative works. Through Jan. 9. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—Part two of "The American Century" is a vast improvement over its predecessor, and not just because American art gathered momentum after the Second World War. The exhibition design as a whole is clearer: film clips and "historical" displays have been segregated to small side rooms, so they don't compete directly with the nearly seven hundred art works. On the upper floors, curator Lisa Phillips succeeds in making a familiar story feel almost fresh. The Abstract Expressionist gallery is a pleasure, and the appearance of a Chuck Close portrait in a room devoted to Minimalism seems smartly provocative. Only in the later rooms do the skewed priorities and omissions begin to become apparent. From this show you could learn a lot about television sitcoms of the seventies, but you would never know, for example, that the decade witnessed a major revival of representational painting. The exhibition ends with a whimper: can the nineties really have been as sterile a decade as it seems here? Don't believe it. Through Feb. 13. (Open Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)



"Making Things," an installation by the fashion designer Issey Miyake, at Ace.

HIROSHI TANABE

American Museum of Natural History, Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—*National Geographic* meets the East Village in "Body Art: Marks of Identity," which features Pre-Colombian nose ornaments from Peru beside contemporary photographs of the pierced and tattooed natives of New York and San Francisco. Through May 29. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Brooklyn Museum of Art, Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"Eastman Johnson: Painting America" is a fascinating retrospective exhibition, the first in more than twenty-five years, of Winslow Homer's greatest rival. In many ways, the two Yankee painters were similar: both trained in Boston print shops, painted firsthand scenes of the Civil War, and made pioneering images of newly emancipated slaves. During most of their lifetimes, however, Johnson, twelve years older, was by far the more established and successful artist. Several of Homer's best-loved early canvases (notably "Snap the Whip") were almost certainly modelled on paintings by Johnson. In later life, however, Johnson settled into a sentimental tidiness, delighting in modest delicacies of chiaroscuro, texture, and color. "Of all our artists he has the most coquetry of manipulation," Henry James wrote. There are dozens of impressive works here, including his masterpiece "The Cranberry Pickers," but none that really belies James's gentle dismissal. Through Feb. 6. . . . ¶ "Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection." Through Jan. 9. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

Fashion Institute of Technology, Seventh Ave. at 27th St. (217-5800)—"Unmistakably Mackie." Too much is not enough for the lavish Bob Mackie, as this thirty-year retrospective makes crystal (not to mention bugle-bead, sequin, and rhinestone) clear. More than a hundred and twenty-five costumes are on display, fashioned for stars ranging from the designer's early muse Mitzi Gaynor and the Supreme Diana Ross to the doll Barbie ("Mackie's greatest model since Cher," according to a museum pamphlet). She who believes in life after love (that's Cher, for those of you who didn't turn on the radio last summer) gets her own mini-retrospective, replete with video clips. The back gallery includes delightful paper dolls Mackie made as a child, but the real showstopper is a video-montage of the costumes in action. Try as you might to maintain ironic distance, just one glimpse of Cher, Bette Midler, and Elton John in seventies regalia belting out "Never Can Say Goodbye" will fill you with glee. Through Dec. 31. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, noon to 8; Saturdays, 10 to 5.)

Jewish Museum, Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (423-3200)—Kaiser Wilhelm II was a notorious killjoy, but the era named after him saw a giddy efflorescence of artistic, theatrical, and literary innovation, admirably surveyed in "Berlin Metropolis: Jews and the New Culture, 1880-1914." German Jews, excluded from government, the military, and the universities, played a major role in these developments, from the Berlin Secession of 1899 to the beginning of the film industry. There's a lot here (more than two hundred and fifty objects are on display, from paintings, posters, and film clips to vitrines full of memorabilia), but curator Emily D. Bilski has kept urban sprawl in check by focussing on the lives of a few prominent individuals such as Max Liebermann, Herwalth Walden, and Ernst Lubitsch. There are a few odd gaps (only one painting by the young Max Beckmann?), but this is a festive, cogent show. Through April 23. . . . ¶ "John Singer Sargent: Portraits of the Wertheimer Family." Through Feb. 6. (Open Sundays through Thursdays, 11 to 5:45, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

The New Museum, 583 Broadway (219-1222)—If you associate interactivity with the glow of your computer screen, then this retrospective of works by the influential Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles will be an eye-opening—not to mention sock-and-shoe-removing—experience. "Red Shift" is a three-room installation created in response to Brazil's reign of terror in the late sixties. It ends with a sink askew on a wall, its tap flowing red—theatricality overblown to the point of melodrama. More effective is the poetic, frightening "Volatile," which takes you barefoot (follow instructions, please) through a darkened J-shaped chamber lit by a single flame and filled with several tons of gray talc and the smell of natural gas. Through March 5. (Open Wednesdays and Sundays, noon to 6; Thursdays through Saturdays, noon to 8.)

New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. (869-8089)—"Seeing Is Believing" is a lavish, eclectic exhibition of scientific and medical illustrations, from the Middle Ages to the early twentieth century. Among the most spectacular works are Robert Hooke's "Micrographia" (the first book devoted to microscopic observations), open to a centerfold of a gigantic flea, and Andreas Vesalius's great anatomy textbook, "De Humani Corporis Fabrica," with its heroic flayed-muscle figures, believed to have been drawn by the studio of Titian. Much of what's on view is deliciously gruesome, elaborate, or fanciful. After a sequence of fantastical medieval cosmologies, Copernicus's heliocentric version seems disappointingly staid. Through Feb. 19. (Open Mondays and Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 to 7:30.)

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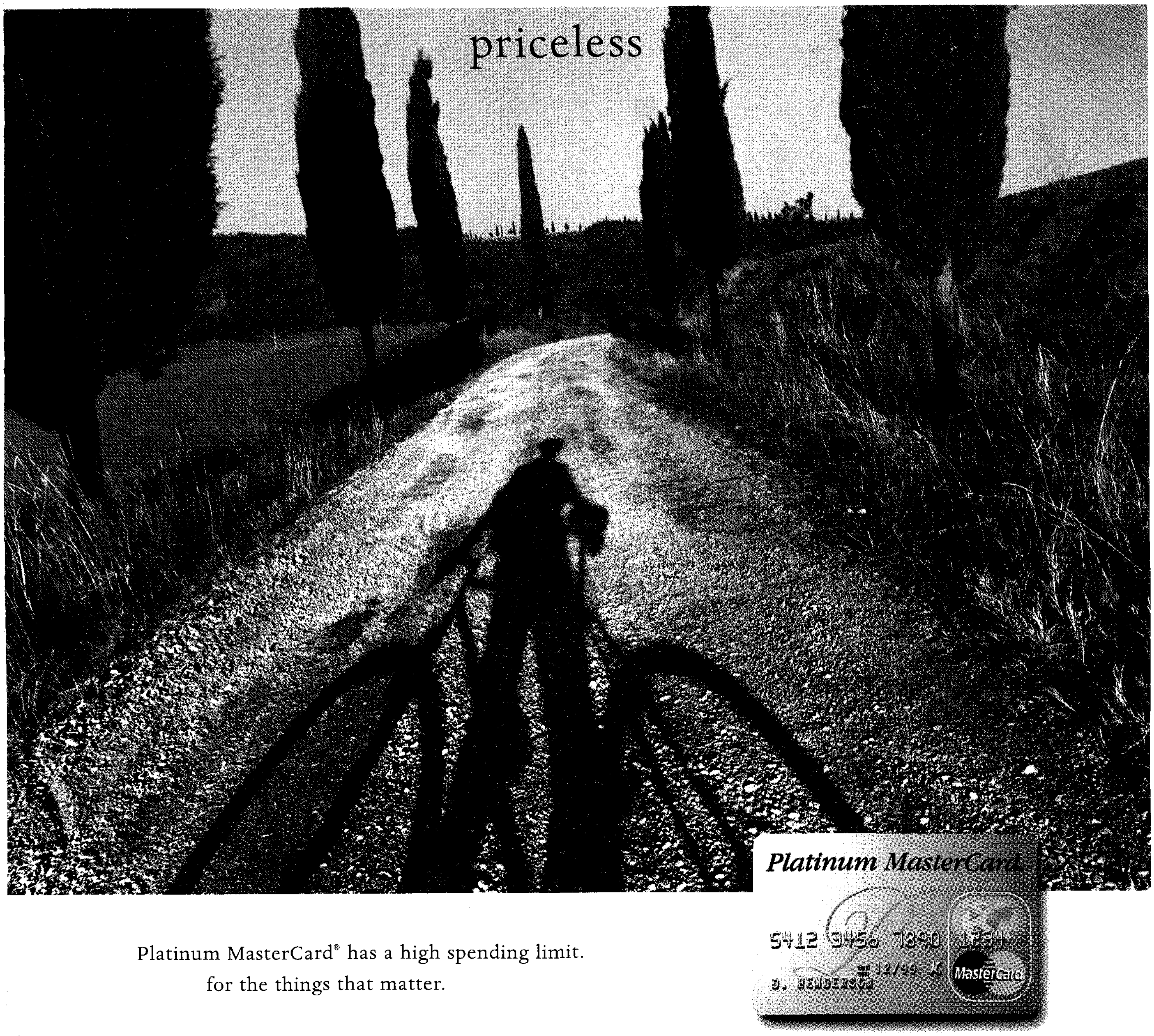

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GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.)

Gregory Gillespie—Visitors who have seen the artist's triumphant retrospective at M.I.T.'s List Center (it remains on view through Jan. 4 and then travels to Youngstown, Ohio) will be puzzled by the thirty small paintings here. Painted on wood, glass, and a tree stump, they display none of the mesmerizing verisimilitude for which Gillespie is best known. Instead, these mandalas, landscapes, and sexualized doodles glow with bright, casually brushed color, as if Gillespie, after years of working with a magnifying glass and triple-zero brushes, had suddenly decided to become a late-blooming modernist. Often, the new works suggest a debt to Howard Hodgkin, probably the last artist one would have thought to associate with Gillespie. Through Dec. 31. (Forum, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 355-4545.)

"Saved from Europe"—A distinguished loan show commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of this gallery, and the escape of Otto Kallir, its founder. Fleeing the Nazis in 1938, Kallir arrived in New York a year later with a trove of work by modern Austrian and German artists, at that time little known in this country. Among the more than fifty paintings, prints, and drawings reunited here are masterworks by Kokoschka, Schiele, and especially Klimt, including the latter's superb painting of a tiny calm infant hidden within a maelstrom of brightly patterned blankets. Through Jan. 8. (Galerie St. Etienne, 24 W. 57th St. 245-6734.)

Short List—**carroll beckwith,** Berry-Hill, 11 E. 70th St. 744-2300. Through Jan. 15. . . . **lawrence gipe,** Helman, 20 W. 57th St. 245-2888. Through Jan. 22. . . . **cildo meireles,** Galerie Lelong, 20 W. 57th St. 315-0470. Through Jan. 15. . . . **richard serra,** Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 744-2313. Through Jan. 14. (See also Galleries—Chelsea.) . . . **james wyeth,** Graham, 1014 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 535-5767. Through Jan. 15. . . . **chen yifei,** Marlborough, 40 W. 57th St. 541-4900. Open Mondays; through Jan. 15.

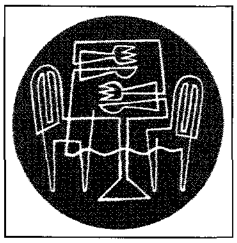
GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Anne Chu—A beautiful, crowded show of sculptures and watercolors inspired by classical Chinese sources including T'ang-dynasty ceramics and scholar's rocks. Chu moves between mediums, shifting from urethane to bronze to ceramic with impressive ease. But it's the immediacy and energy of the painted, rough-hewn wood that prove the most engaging, and also best flaunt her skills as a colorist. The show's centerpiece, "View of Gorge," is a pair of mountains—one a sunny yellow, the other the pink of dawn—that transform the gallery into a room with a view. Through Jan. 15. (AC Project Room, 453 W. 17 St. 645-4970.)

Mike Cockrill—Why would these schoolgirls, with their pigtails, leotards, and handguns, want to execute a bunch of defenseless male clowns? Perhaps because this talented but desperate-for-attention painter simply hasn't thought of a better gimmick. What Cockrill does well—almost too well—is handle a brush: he paints the girls' skinny limbs and bright clothing with a loose-wristed agility that borders on the show-offy. In the service of believable subject matter, Cockrill's skill might be genuinely enticing; instead, these images seem semi-provocative, like a society portraitist's version of Helmut Newton. Through Dec. 24. (Foster, 529 W. 20th St. 299-0044.)

Martí Llorens, Alessandra Spranzi, and **Jörg Zboralski**—Three young Europeans who traffic in unsolved mysteries, commingling fact and fiction. Llorens is a mockumentarian, revisiting aviation history with photographic evidence of great events, to which he appends witty, didactic texts. Mighty convincing until you realize that the "original tin-plate" negative of a hot-air balloon, from 1783, predates the technology of photography by several decades. Spranzi's grainy black-and-white photographs offer domestic still-lifes of hovering goblets and levitating funnels in scenarios so mundane that they make levitation seem more commonplace than uncanny. Zboralski laser-prints pages from disparate sources, so that crop circles and Smithson's "Spiral Jetty" become equivalent. Through Jan. 15. (Murray Guy, 453 W. 17 St. 463-7372.)

TABLES FOR TWO



Michael Jordan's The Steak House N.Y.C., north balcony, Grand Central Terminal (655-2300)—In the gloriously renovated cathedral-like beauty of Grand Central Terminal, New Yorkers do what they do best: rush around. It's a spectacular *stadium*, which is why it's so enjoyable during the holidays to sit in this terrace restaurant and watch the mob surge like an asteroid belt around the information booth's gilded clock. A private dining room (where Mr. Jordan eats his steak when he's in town) and a tobacco room are available, but the best seats are along the marble balustrade overlooking the concourse. A bit public, yes, but the size of the room transforms the collective roar into pleasing white noise, and close conversation is surprisingly audible.

Early in the evening, while diners are starting with wine and warm garlic bread with Gorgonzola fondue or the blue-crab bisque, a briefcase crowd rules the floor (some of whom pause to relax in the restaurant's roomy, comfortable bar). The somewhat tacky laser show dancing (for your holiday amusement) across the star-mapped ceiling every hour might hold your attention until the arrival of the classic iceberg salad—a quarter head of lettuce with tomatoes and onions and a boat of blue-cheese dressing. (The more elaborate, seafood appetizers tend to be bland.) By the time the waiter brings the entrées, briefcases have given way to shopping bags on the main floor, the din has diminished a bit, and attention can be turned to conquering the immense portions of food at hand. The sumptuous steaks (a double porterhouse for two, a towering filet, a New York strip, as well as a pepper-crusted buffalo sirloin and other nonbeef cuts), for which a veritable hunting knife is supplied, are formidable and expensive. But they're a bargain compared to the three-and-a-half-pound lobsters, which, at twenty bucks a pound, are quite a commitment. The old-fashioned sides of comfort food (creamed spinach, macaroni and cheese, and a gratin of potatoes, blue cheese, and bacon) are offered à la carte, so it's easy to order too much. If you don't finish, you can make off with a souvenir rope-handled doggie bag. (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Entrées, $17-$33.)

Matthew McCaslin—No need to drive to Queens to see the Christmas lights. This kaleidoscopic show, inspired by the sights at Coney Island and other amusement parks, beats the reindeer-on-the-roof displays by a mile. Televisions are attached to metal rods and fanned out like so many cars on a carnival ride; fireworks, electric lights, and computer-manipulated psychedelic imagery can be seen on the monitors. The clanging, whirring soundtracks heighten the atmosphere of spectacle, until you feel that your ride might break free of the track. McCaslin's best show in years. Through Jan. 15. (Feigen, 535 W. 20th St. 929-0500.)

Thomas Scheibitz—Switch-hitting between architectonic abstraction and landscape, this up-and-coming young German artist paints with sure-handed clarity, and a palette of bright, yogurty colors. As in his last show, the abstractions are effortlessly handsome: imagine Sol LeWitt's wall decorations painted with the brisk nonchalance of Raoul Dufy. The landscapes, however, with their picket fences, huge spiky flowers, and picturesque mountain chalets, suggest a more puzzling and compelling use of Scheibitz's talents. An artist to watch. Through Jan. 15. (Bonakdar Jancou, 521 W. 21st St. 414-4144.)

Richard Serra—The man of steel is back and better than ever, inaugurating the latest (and most gargantuan) outpost of the Gagosian empire. Six curving monoliths, each fifty-two feet long and thirteen and a half feet high, are installed in a triangular configuration. A series of narrow passages converge in a central space that recalls either a Zendo or lockdown, depending on your mood. The planar shifts of the soaring, rusted slabs make you feel that you're both within and outside of the sculpture. A rare opportunity to use the words "graceful" and "two-ton" in the same sentence. Through Feb. 26. (Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 741-1111. See also Uptown Short List.)

"Loaf"—Twenty-one sculptures loafing around, independent of presentation devices such as shelves, vitrines, or, for the most part, pedestals. Some objects plop right down on the floor, like Louise Bourgeois's gleaming bronze with gold patina, "End of Softness." Others stand tall, like Barry X. Ball's indescribably freaky black-and-white porcelainlike "Flayed Herm." Materials run the gamut from beeswax to steel, as biomorphic abstraction meets realism (if you can call Carl Dalvia's bright-orange conflation of surrealism and modernist furniture "real.") Any way you slice it, it's a great show. Through Jan. 15. (Baumgartner, 418 W. 15th St. 633-2276.)

Short List—**reed anderson,** Clementine, 526 W. 26th St. 243-5937. Through Jan. 2. . . . **christoph draeger,** Liebman Magnan, 552 W. 24th St. 255-3225. Through Jan. 22. . . . **dan flavin,** Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 255-1105. Through Jan. 29. . . . **pouran jinchi,** Nikolai, 505 W. 22nd St. 414-8511. Through Jan. 29. . . . **ewan gibbs,** Morris, 465 W. 23rd St. 727-2752. Through Jan. 22. . . . **john miller,** Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 206-7100. Through Jan. 22.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

George Condo—Painting with a recklessness that borders on mania, this energetic underachiever has filled up two galleries with completely different but equally half-baked shows. The "portraits" at Deitch feature clownish, chipmunk-faced personages more or less indistinguishable from recent work by Sean Landers. Meanwhile, at Pace, Condo offers a group of enormous abstract tributes to Jimi Hendrix, as well as various jazz greats. It turns out—surprise!—that all of jazz looks like a combination of Pollock and Arshile Gorky. What's frustrating is that once in each show (the portrait called "Big Red" and the tribute to Thelonious Monk) Condo's talent stands out, reminding us that he's capable of more than just meeting a production quota. Both shows through Jan. 15. (Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St., 343-7300; and Pace Wildenstein, 142 Greene St., 431-9224.)

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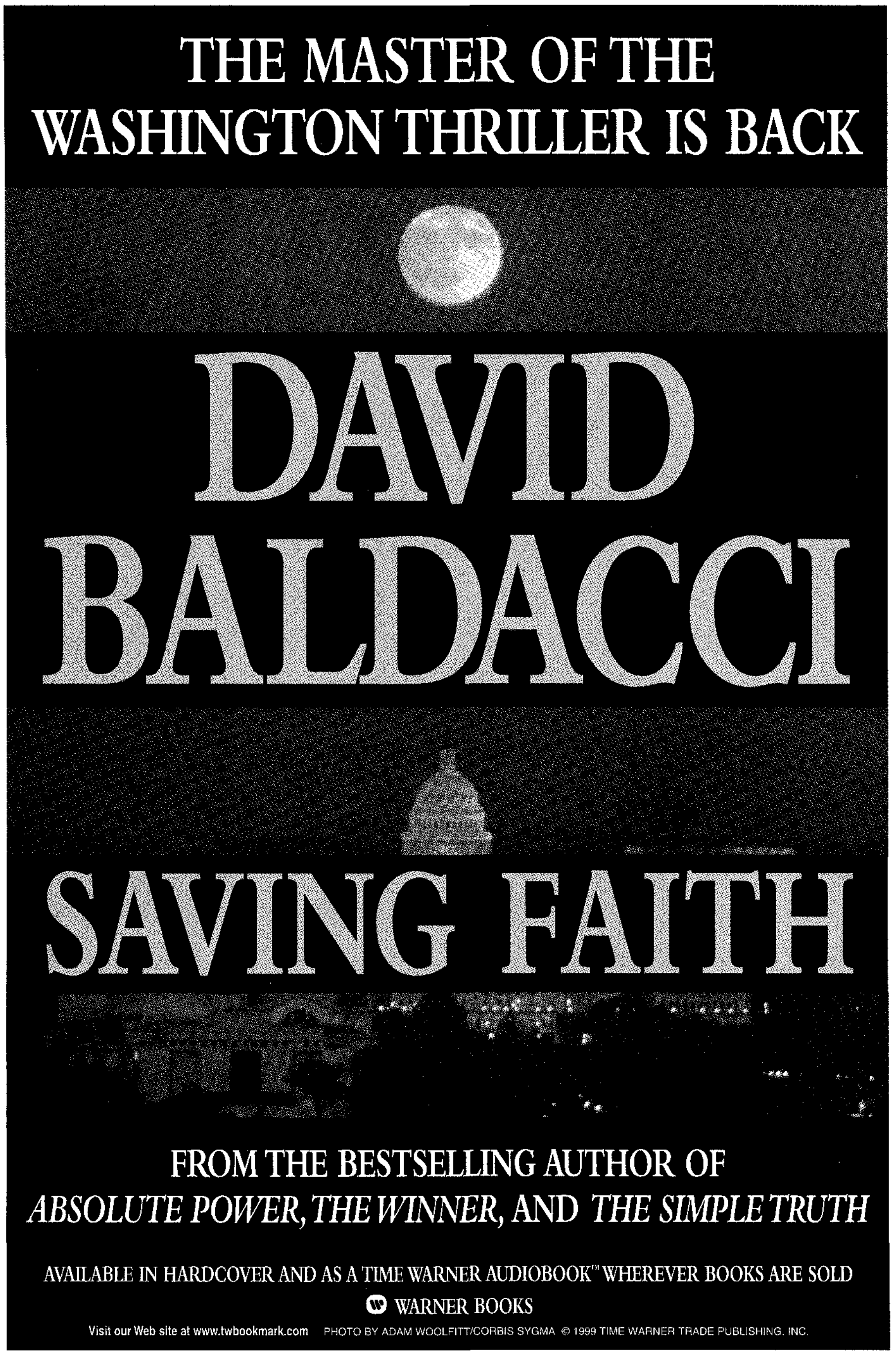
Issey Miyake—The Ace gallery puts on a museum-quality installation extravaganza (and, like a museum, charges gallerygoers to see it). The entry hall glitters with a gold-and-silver recycling project that stretches from floor to ceiling—cast-off clothes pressed between sheets of foil that betray the shimmering outlines of old socks, jeans, and T-shirts. Miyake has engineered a great range of effects: in one room, sixteen of the designer's airy and outlandish outfits—origami ninja suits, Cat-in-the-Hat party jammies, Noguchi-lamp outfits—bounce in the air with a weird jauntiness. A giant roll of tube-knit black dresses snakes from one mannequin to the next. Down the hall, computer projections of single sheets of fabric morph into dresses or outfits, and projecting this transubstantiation onto the gallery's cement floor creates a ghostly effect—as though only our clothes had the power to rise from the grave. Through Feb. 29. (275 Hudson St. 255-5599.)

Aletha Zapf—A modest installation that transforms gallerygoers into tourists. Upon entering, viewers are confronted by the first of Zapf's photographic projections: an image of puzzled-looking strangers with knapsacks and guidebooks. Inside, three more images show milling crowds in the Florence Accademia, accompanied by a soundtrack of polyglot murmurings. To leave, you walk through a curtain on which is projected a final image of culture seekers on their way back to their hotels. People-watching, Zapf gently implies, is a grand tour in itself. Through Jan. 15. (Lee, 377 Broome St. 343-3950.)

Short List—**REVEREND ETHAN ACRES,** Keenan, 3 Crosby St. 431-5083. Through Jan. 22. . . . **CHARLES ARNOLDI,** Cowles, 74 Grand St. 925-3500. Through Jan. 29. . . . **MICHAEL CRAIG-MARTIN,** Blum, 99 Wooster St. 343-0441. Through Jan. 29. . . . **ELISE ENGLER,** Bodell, 13 E. 7th St. 477-1820. Through Jan. 16. . . . **JULIÃO SARMENTO,** Sean Kelly, 43 Mercer St. 343-2405. Through Jan. 22.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PHOTOGRAPHY

"American Photographs, Part 3"—The final installment in James Danziger's trilogy of blue-chip shows includes work by Irving Penn, Cindy Sherman, Adam Fuss, Sally Mann, Richard Avedon, and others. Through Dec. 24. (Danziger, 851 Madison Ave., at 70th St. 734-5300.)

"Ancient History: Photographs of the Ancient World, 1851-1996"—Images of monuments, ruins, pictographs, and more, by such artists as Linda Connor, Lynn Davis, Louis de Clercq, Laura Gilpin, Richard Misrach, Andrew Moore, Felix Teynard, and Tseng Kwong Chi. Through Jan. 15. (Richardson, 560 Broadway. 343-1255.)

"Earth from Above"—A delightful series of large color photographs by the French aerial photographer Yann Arthus-Bertrand, taken while flying over more than sixty countries. Through Jan. 29. (Science, Industry, and Business Library, New York Public Library, Madison Ave. at 34th St. 869-8089.)

Group Show—Recent works by Marianne Courville, Meghan Gerety, and Alexandra Rowley. Through Jan. 15. (Grimm, 505 W. 28th St. 564-7662. Open Wednesdays through Saturdays, 11 to 7.)

International Center of Photography—"Propaganda and Dreams: Photographing the 1930s in the USSR and the US." Through Feb. 13. (1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. 860-1777. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5; Fridays, 10 to 8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6.)

Holiday Exhibitions—Really just a fun excuse to head uptown and grab some photographic gifts, many of them moderately priced. At **ALAN KLOTZ/PHOTOCOLLECT** there are images by biggies like Nadar, Stieglitz, Steichen, and Strand alongside vernacular pictures by Anonymous. Through Dec. 23. (22 E. 72nd St. 327-2211. Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 7.) . . . ¶ **DE LELLIS** has works by, among others, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Doris Ulmann, and W. Eugene Smith. Through Dec. 24. (47 E. 68th St. 327-1482.)

Short List—**JAYNE HINDS BIDAUT** and **LARRY GIANETTINO,** Ricco/Maresca, 529 W. 20th St. 627-4819. Both shows through Jan. 15. . . . **BRASSAÏ,** Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 750-7070. Through Jan. 8. . . . **ELAINE LUSTIG COHEN** and **DIDIER MASSARD,** Saul, 560 Broadway. 431-0747. Both shows through Jan. 15. . . . **JOHN COPLANS,** Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 627-6000. Through Jan. 15. . . . **JOHN DUGDALE,** Wessel and O'Connor, 242 W. 26th St. 242-8811. Open Sundays; through Jan. 9. . . . **ANDREAS GURSKY,** Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 243-0200. Through Jan. 15. . . . **HIRO,** Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 759-7999. Through Jan. 15. . . . **PETER MILLER** and **CATHERINE LEUTHOLD,** Leica, 670 Broadway. 777-3051. Opens Saturdays at noon; both shows through Jan. 15. . . . **RUTH ORKIN,** Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010. Through Jan. 22. . . . **RENÉ-JACQUES,** Gallery 292, at 120 Wooster St. 431-0292. Through Jan. 22. . . . **ANDREA ROBBINS AND MAX BECHER,** Tonkonow, 601 W. 26th St. 255-8450. Through Jan. 29. . . . **DENNIS STOCK,** Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway. 966-6223. Through Jan. 22. . . . **THOMAS STRUTH,** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 977-7160. Open Mondays; through Dec. 31. . . . **JERRY UELSMANN,** Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 397-3930. Through Dec. 24.

(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

(The box-office number for Avery Fisher Hall is 875-5030 and for Carnegie Hall and Weill Recital Hall, 247-7800.)

HOLIDAY MUSIC

Carolling—Dec. 22 at 12:30: The Tapestry vocal ensemble invites the public to join in for an hour of a-cappella renditions as it wanders through the public spaces of the

World Financial Center. (Battery Park City. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ Dec. 24 at 5: An annual gathering near the arch in Washington Square Park, in which all are invited to "sing lustily, even if out of tune," the better to rival the attending brass quintet. (No tickets necessary.)

National Choral Council—The group's annual "Messiah" sing-along, in which seventeen conductors take turns at the podium and the audience helps out with the choruses. (Avery Fisher Hall. Dec. 22 at 8. For information about tickets, call 333-5333.)

"A Fool's Mass"—Lighthearted parodies of sacred liturgies have frequently surfaced in popular entertainment through the centuries, most often during holiday seasons. Dzieci, a musical-theatre group directed by Matt Mitler, here offers its signature piece, in which a group of village idiots living during the plague years enact their own well-intentioned, if not entirely orthodox, Mass due to the sudden demise of their pastor. The music is drawn from sacred hymns and chants from the eighth through the seventeenth centuries. (St. Francis of Assisi Church, 135 W. 31st St. Dec. 23 at 1:15. No tickets necessary.)

Boys Choir of Harlem—Walter J. Turnbull directs Bach's motet "Singet dem Herrn" and many seasonal pieces, with members of the New York Philharmonic providing instrumental backup. (Avery Fisher Hall. Dec. 23 at 8.)

New York's Ensemble for Early Music—Frederick Renz directs medieval Christmas songs and carols, both sacred and secular. (Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. 280-0330. Dec. 25 at 3 and 8 and Dec. 26 at 3.)

Klezmer Conservatory Band—The annual holiday-season klezmer festivities, with Hankus Netsky directing. (Avery Fisher Hall. Dec. 26 at 8.)

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera—**l'elisir d'amore**, with Youngok Shin, Frank Lopardo, Dmitri Hvorostovsky, and Paul Plishka; conducted by Evelino Pidò. (Dec. 22 at 8.) . . . John Harbison's **the great gatsby**, with Dawn Upshaw, Susan Graham, Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, Jerry Hadley, Mark Baker, Dwayne Croft, and Richard Paul Fink; James Levine. (Dec. 23 at 7:30, Dec. 29 and Jan. 4 at 8, and Jan. 1 at 1:30.) . . . **rigoletto**, with Sumi Jo, Victoria Livengood, Marcelo Alvarez, and Paolo Gavanelli; Vladimir Jurowski. (Dec. 24 at 7, Dec. 27 at 7:30, and Dec. 30 and Jan. 3 at 8.) . . . **le nozze di figaro**, with Amanda Roocroft, Barbara Bonney, Susanne Mentzer, Bo Skovhus, and Ildebrando D'Arcangelo; Edo de Waart. (Dec. 25 at 1:30.) . . . **tosca**, with Carol Vaness, Richard Leech, and James Morris; Daniel Oren. (Dec. 28 and Jan. 1 at 8.) . . . **die fledermaus**: The company limits its New Year's Eve performance to Act II (Prince Orlofsky's party), which it expands into an evening-long gala thanks to surprise visits from whichever opera stars are passing through the neighborhood. The principal cast includes Ms. Vaness, Jennifer Welch, Jochen Kowalski, Thomas Allen, Earle Patriarco, and John Del Carlo; Patrick Summers conducts. (Dec. 31 at 7.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

Amato Opera Company—Presenting "Die Fledermaus." (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 228-8200. Dec. 26 and Jan. 2 at 2:30 and Dec. 31 at 7. Through Jan. 9.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic—At Avery Fisher Hall, Kurt Masur conducting. Dec. 29-30 at 8: The première of "All Rise," a large-scale work by Wynton Marsalis; the orchestra is joined by the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra (led by Mr. Marsalis) and the Morgan State University Choir. . . . ¶ Dec. 31 at 7:30: Anne-Sophie Mutter is the soloist in Bach's E-Major Violin Concerto (BWV 1042) by

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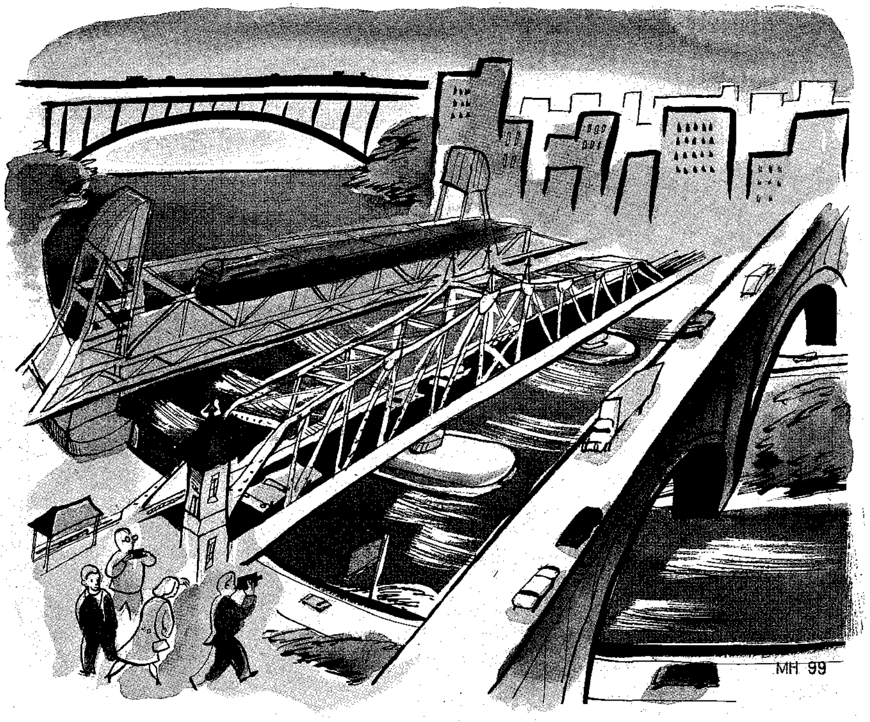
way of a prelude to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, with the New York Choral Artists, American Boychoir, and soloists Sylvia McNair (soprano), Florence Quivar (mezzo-soprano), Stanford Olsen (tenor), and René Pape (bass).

All-Japan Society for the Beethoven Ninth Symphony—Japan is obsessed with Beethoven's Ninth; at year's end, vast choruses convene in various cities throughout the country to perform it. (A turnout of ten thousand singers, for example, is typical for an annual performance in Osaka sponsored by the Suntory Brewery.) In this performance, singers from the All-Japan Society are joined by American choristers plus the Kansai Youth Symphony of Japan, yielding a total ensemble of some four hundred musicians to be conducted by Kazuhiko Komatsu in this enduring paean to brotherhood. (Carnegie Hall. Dec. 23 at 8.)

New York String Orchestra—The student orchestra convenes at Carnegie Hall, as it does every year at this season. Jaime Laredo conducts. Dec. 24 at 7: An all-Mozart program, consisting of the composer's first and last symphonies—the First (K. 16) having been written in 1764, when he was eight, the last (the "Jupiter") dating from twenty-four years later—in addition to the G-Major Violin Concerto (with Cho-Liang Lin as soloist).... ¶ Dec. 28 at 8: Corigliano's "Voyage," Mozart's A-Major Violin Concerto (featuring Jennifer Koh), Mendelssohn's Piano Concerto No. 1 (with Jonathan Biss), and Beethoven's Symphony No. 7.



A Christmas-day tour of Harlem River bridges.

MARCELLUS HALL

P. D. Q. Bach—This year, the zany professor Peter Schickele titles his program "Ears Wide Shut," which is probably as good a way as any to approach such musicological curiosities as P.D.Q.'s String Quartet in F Major (the "Moose"), his "Royal Firewater Music," and his Concerto for Piano vs. Orchestra—this last featuring Professor Schickele himself as "enabler," in tandem (or not) with the New York Pick-Up Ensemble, led by "semiconductor" Kenneth Jean. (Carnegie Hall. Dec. 27 and Dec. 29 at 8.)

Manhattan Chamber Sinfonia—Glen Barton Cortese conducts an excerpt from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, in addition to pieces by Corigliano, Saint-Saëns, Mozart, Rachmaninoff, Deborah Drattell, and Paul Winter. (Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. 662-2133. Dec. 31 at 7:30.)

Amor Artis Chorus and Baroque Orchestra—Johannes Somary directs an all-Bach program that comprises the "Brandenburg" Concerto No. 2, Cantata No. 191 ("Gloria in Excelsis"), Concerto for Three Harpsichords, and "Magnificat." (St. Jean Baptiste Church, Lexington Ave. at 76th St. Dec. 31 at 8. For information about tickets, call 874-4513.)

Strauss Symphony of America—The Swedish conductor Ola Rudner leads this annual re-creation of the traditional, world-famous Viennese New Year's concert, which includes waltzes and galops by Johann Strauss, Jr. (some danced by members of the Vienna State Opera Ballet), as well as excerpts from Viennese operettas (featuring soprano Eva Bátori and baritone Jeffrey Dowd). (Avery Fisher Hall. Jan. 1 at 2:30.)

RECITALS

Bargemusic—Dec. 22 and Dec. 24 at 7:30: At least a dozen musicians crowd onto Bargemusic's intimate stage to launch the organization's twenty-second annual year-end presentations of Bach's "Brandenburg" Concertos. In these concerts, the musicians offer the Concertos No. 2, No. 4, and No. 5.... ¶ Dec. 29 at 7:30: The "Brandenburg" Concertos No. 6, No. 3, and No. 1 (and, if history serves as a precedent, you can bet the evening will conclude with a breakneck run-through of the finale of the Third Concerto, as an encore.)... ¶ Dec. 31 at 7:30: All six concertos, in a millennial benefit concert. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061.)

Extended Family—New York Philharmonic violinist Yoko Takebe; her daughter, Jennifer Gilbert (also a violinist); her husband, Michael Gilbert (a violist); and her son, Alan Gilbert (the conductor, who is also a violist), are joined by four other string players for a program of chamber works: Brahms's G-Major Sextet, Mendelssohn's Octet, and Wolf's "Italian Serenade." (Weill Recital Hall. Dec. 22 at 8.)

Chamber Potpourri—Violinists Masako Yanagita and Emi Ohi Resnick, cellist Matthias Naegele, and pianist Henry Shapiro offer chamber works by Brahms, Ravel, and Schumann. (New School, 66 W. 12th St. Dec. 22 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

Sundays on the Island—Dec. 26 at noon: Oboist Gerard Reuter, bassoonist Martin Koosman, and pianist Ilan Rechtman perform chamber works by C. P. E. Bach, Poulenc, and Mr. Rechtman.... ¶ Jan. 2 at noon: Sonatas by Mozart and Beethoven, along with Sarasate's "Carmen Fantasy," performed by violinist Yosuke Kawasaki and pianist Vadim Serebryany. (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 718-885-2478.)

Andrew Bolotowsky—Performing all twelve of Telemann's fantasies for solo flute. (Donnell Library Auditorium, 20 W. 53rd St. Dec. 27 at 2:30. No tickets necessary.)

Lisa Terry—The Baroque cellist plays Bach's D-Minor Suite for Unaccompanied Cello, as well as several ricercars by the late-Renaissance Bolognese composer Domenico Gabrielli (apparently not related to the more famous Venetian Gabrielis, as the divergent spelling suggests), who has gone into the history books as the first composer to write music for unaccompanied cello. (St. Francis of Assisi Church, 135 W. 31st St. Dec. 30 at 1:15. No tickets necessary.)

Organ and Brass—Organist Stephen Hamilton is joined by a brass choir for festive music by Giovanni Gabrieli, Handel, Vierne, and others. (Church of the Holy Trinity, 316 E. 88th St. 289-4100. Dec. 31 at 8.)

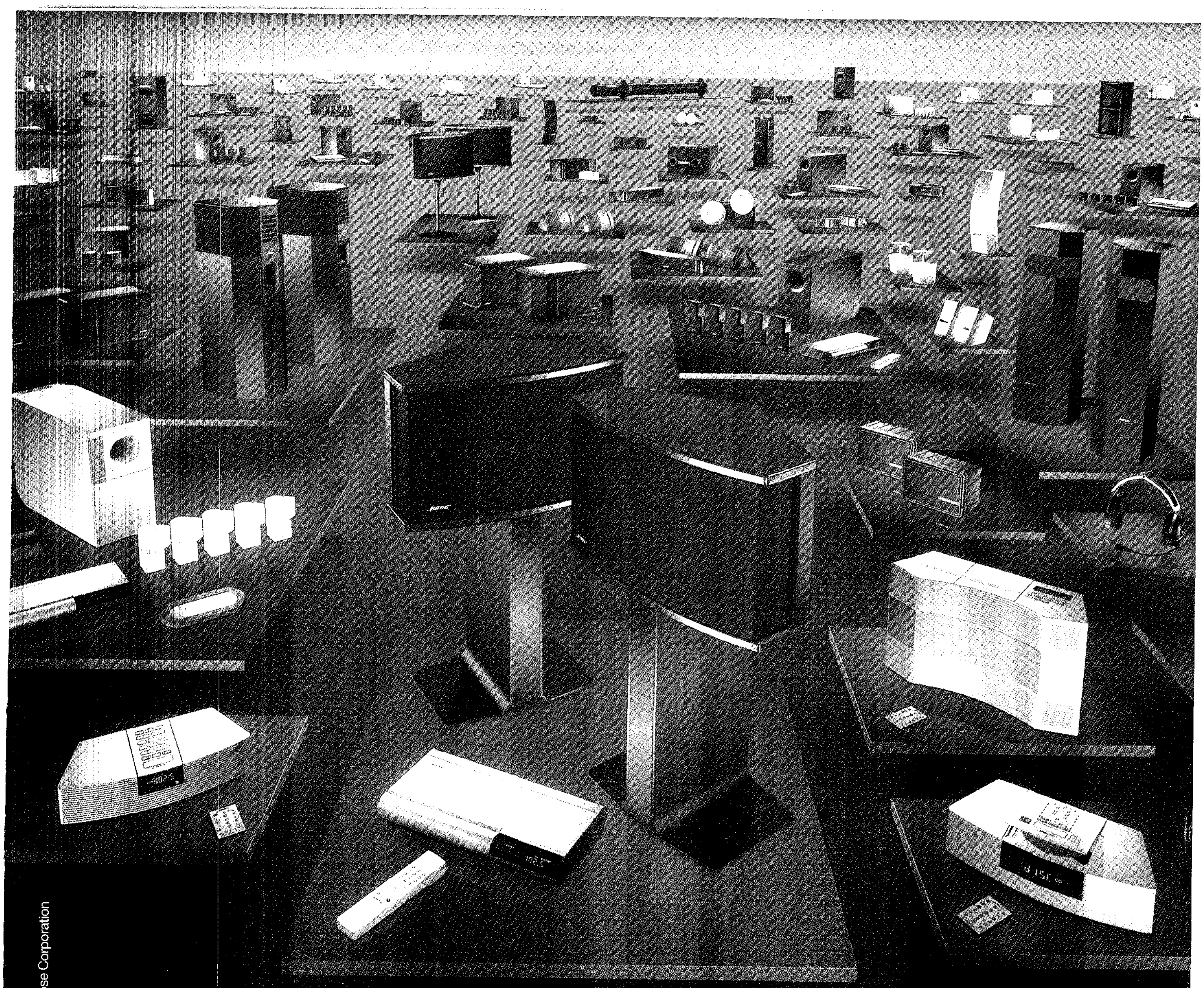
William Trafka—The organist, playing the mammoth Aeolian-Skinner instrument of St. Bartholomew's Church (whose 12,442 pipes make it the largest organ in New York City), offers Bach's Passacaglia and Fugue in C Minor (BWV 582), Franck's Chorale in A-Flat Minor, and works by Mozart, Arthur Bliss, Brahms, and Jehan Alain, plus—at the stroke of the millennial midnight—Copland's "Fanfare for the Common Man." (Park Ave. at 50th St. Dec. 31 at 11. No tickets necessary.)

Bradshaw and Buono—The piano duo is assisted by several colleagues in works by Strauss, Ravel, Rossini, and others. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Jan. 2 at 3.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Holiday Stroll—For many, Christmas day is the time for giving presents, lounging about the house, and waiting for the turkey to finish roasting. For Katherine Criss, a peripatetic photographer, it's also a good time for some fresh air. "After the morning is over there's not a lot to do," she says, "and not everybody wants to watch TV all day long." Criss is a member of Shorewalkers, a nonprofit environmental organization that explores the city's shores and wetlands, and this Christmas she'll be leading what she calls a "photogenic tour" of four of the bridges that cross the Harlem River. Starting with majestic views of the Hudson River from the high span of the Henry Hudson Bridge, Criss heads into the Bronx, returns to Manhattan via the low-lying Broadway Bridge, travels back to the Bronx on the Fordham Bridge, and finally comes home along the arched masonry of the city's third-oldest standing bridge, the Washington Bridge. (Dec. 25 at noon. For more information, call 330-7686.)

Readings—Jan. 1, beginning at 2: Patti Smith, Richard Hell, Dael Orlandersmith, Richard Foreman, Penny Arcade, and more than a hundred other writers, musicians, dancers, and performers gather for the annual marathon reading at the Poetry Project. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. Tickets at the door.)... ¶ Jan. 1 at 4: More word-of-mouth festivities with "Absolute Zero: The Alternative New Year's Day Spoken Word/Performance Extravaganza," featuring David Jenness, Jennifer Blowdryer, Eve Packer, and another hundred or so writers, actors, musicians, and the like. (CBGB's Lounge, 313 Bowery. No tickets necessary.)... ¶ Jan. 4 at 8: David Lehman, Rebecca Wolff, and Andrew Zawacki read their poetry. (National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park S. No tickets necessary.)



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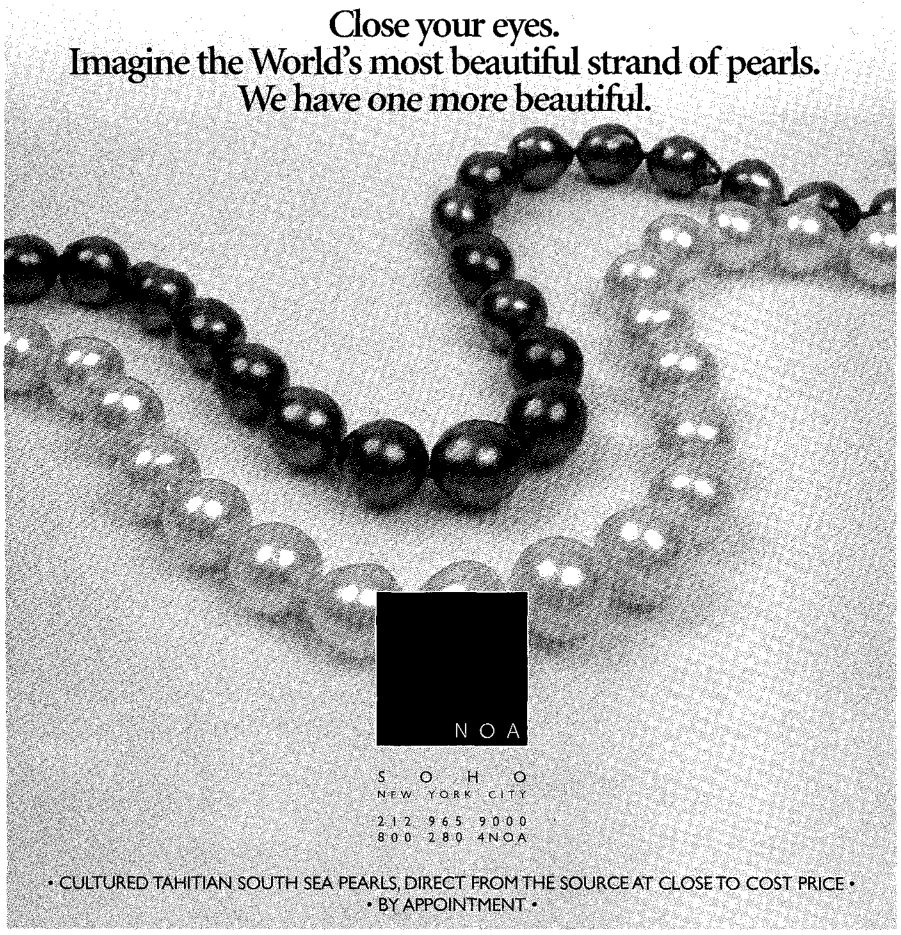
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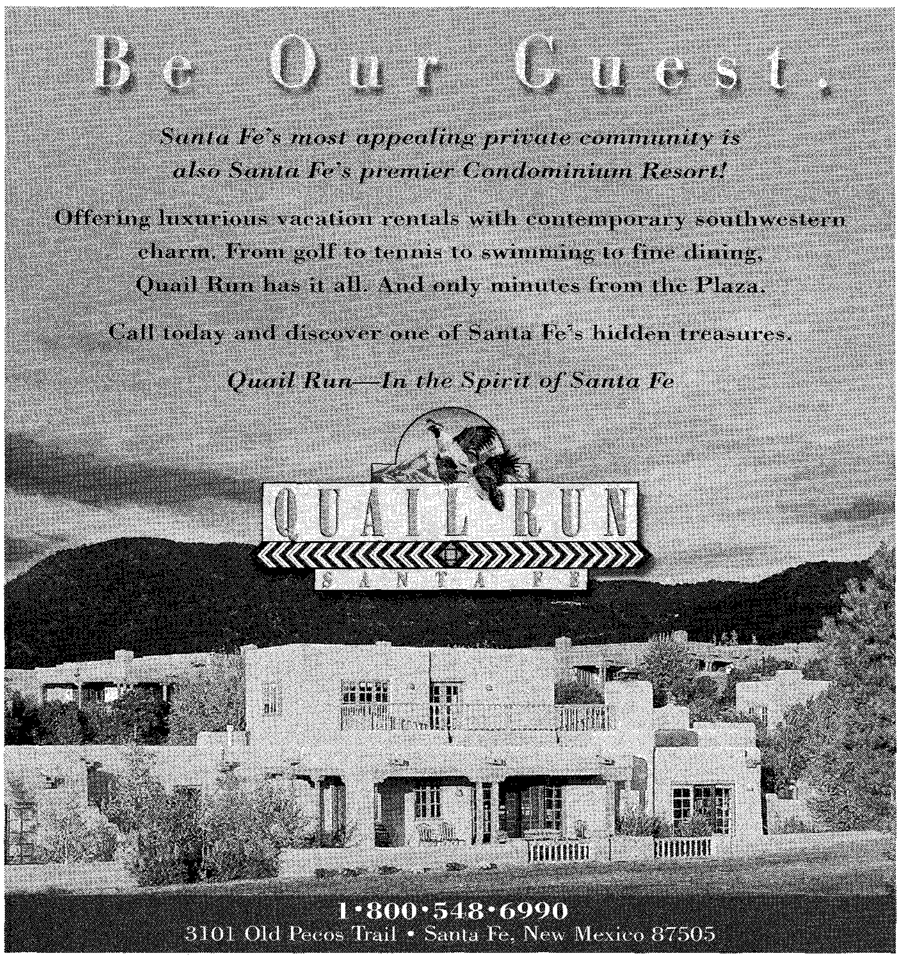
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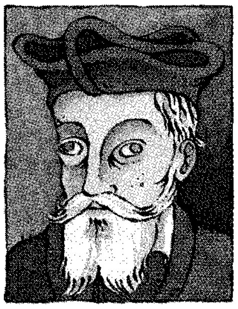
BOOK CURRENTS

Predictability

FORTUNE-TELLERS have taken many different forms over the centuries, from oracles and prophets to mystics and tarot-card readers. Some believe that the sixteenth-century French physician Nostradamus foresaw the Spanish Armada, the World Wars, Hitler, Nixon, and Prince Charles's marital discord. **The Complete Prophecies of Nostradamus** (Three Rivers), edited by Henry C. Roberts and updated by his grandson, Robert Lawrence, shows that as much art can be needed to read a prophecy as to issue one. For example, in one "seemingly obscure and unintelligible quatrain," the authors find auguries of Napoleon, the French Revolution, and the McCarthy era.



Napoleon regularly consulted an oracle now published as **Napoleon's Book of Fate and Oraculum** (Kessinger), which provides hundreds of fortunes on love, health, business, and warfare, and explains how to read palms and interpret beauty marks and dreams. "To dream of white goats is a sign of wealth and plenty," the Oraculum declares at one point, "but black signify sickness and uncertain lawsuits."

A more up-to-date oracle, **The Book of Destinies** (Running Press), by Jane Struthers, offers blow-by-blow instructions for using the tarot, the zodiac, Chinese astrology, palmistry, numerology, and even pendulums—which, Struthers writes, "have a dual purpose—they can supply the answers to questions about your future, and they can also help you to dowse for lost objects."

Theodora Lau's detailed **Handbook of Chinese Horoscopes** (HarperPerennial), now in its fourth edition, combines the twelve-year Chinese astrological cycle—Horse, Dog, Tiger, and so on—with the traditional zodiac. Napoleon was a Leo, born in the year of the Ox, which means that, like all Leo Oxen, he was "dramatic and pompous," with an "indomitable will" and "the ability to lead effortlessly." Lau could have told him not to court Josephine, a scheming Monkey (incompatible with Oxen), or to fight at Waterloo in 1815, the year of the Boar, which is a "mixed year for the Ox." The Year of the Dragon begins in February, 2000, and it's destined to be a "combustible" year of "excitement, drama and controversy."

SERGIO RUZZIER

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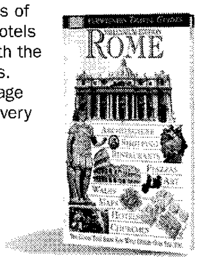

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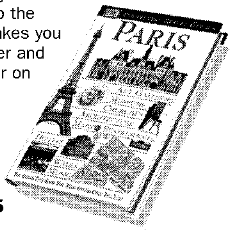

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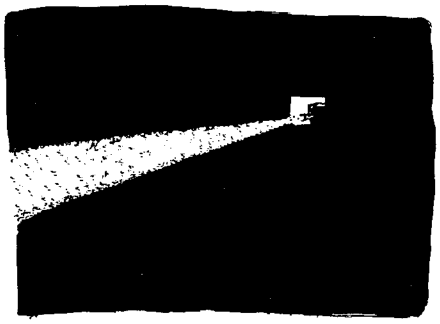


THE MOVIES

OPENING

Angela's Ashes—Reviewed below in Film Notes. Opening Dec. 25.

Any Given Sunday—Al Pacino is an obsessive coach, Dennis Quaid an aging quarterback, and Cameron Diaz an aggressive young owner in this movie about a Miami pro-football team. Directed by Oliver Stone. Also with L.L. Cool J, Jamie Foxx, and Lawrence Taylor. Opening Dec. 22. (Astor Plaza, Chelsea West, Coronet Cinema, Kips Bay, Lincoln Square Cinemas, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.)

Galaxy Quest—A comedy about the washed-up stars of a sci-fi television show (Tim Allen and Sigourney Weaver), who are recruited by confused aliens for an actual space battle. Directed by Dean Parisot. Opening Dec. 25. (Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Orpheum VII.)

Hurricane—Norman Jewison directs Denzel Washington in the true story of Rubin (Hurricane) Carter, a middleweight boxing contender who was wrongly convicted of triple murder in 1966. Opening Dec. 29.

Man on the Moon—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 22.

Mr. Death—Fred A. Leuchter, Jr., an execution specialist who believes that the Holocaust never happened, is the subject of this documentary by director Errol Morris. Opening Dec. 29. (Lincoln Plaza and Quad Cinema.)

Onegin—The jaded aristocrat Eugene Onegin (Ralph Fiennes) attempts to redeem himself after he spurns the love of a country beauty, Tatyana (Liv Tyler), and blunders into a fatal duel. Based on the verse novel by Alexander Pushkin. Directed by Martha Fiennes. Opening Dec. 22. (Cinema Village.)

Snow Falling on Cedars—A Japanese-American fisherman is on trial for murder, and the reporter sent to cover the story, Ishmael Chambers (Ethan Hawke), discovers that the defendant's wife was his first love. With Youki Kudoh. Based on the novel by David Guterson. Directed by Scott Hicks. Opening Dec. 22.

The Talented Mr. Ripley—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 25. (East 85th Street, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatres, 19th Street East 6, 72nd Street East, and Village Theatre VII.)

The Third Miracle—A Catholic priest (Ed Harris) who regularly debunks miracles finds his faith and his celibacy tested when he's asked to investigate a statue that has been crying tears of blood. With Anne Heche. Directed by Agnieszka Holland. Opening Dec. 29.

Titus—Shakespeare's "Titus Andronicus" is the template for Julie Taymor's directorial film début. With Anthony Hopkins and Jessica Lange. Opening Dec. 25.

FILM NOTES

(If a movie has been reviewed recently in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given.)

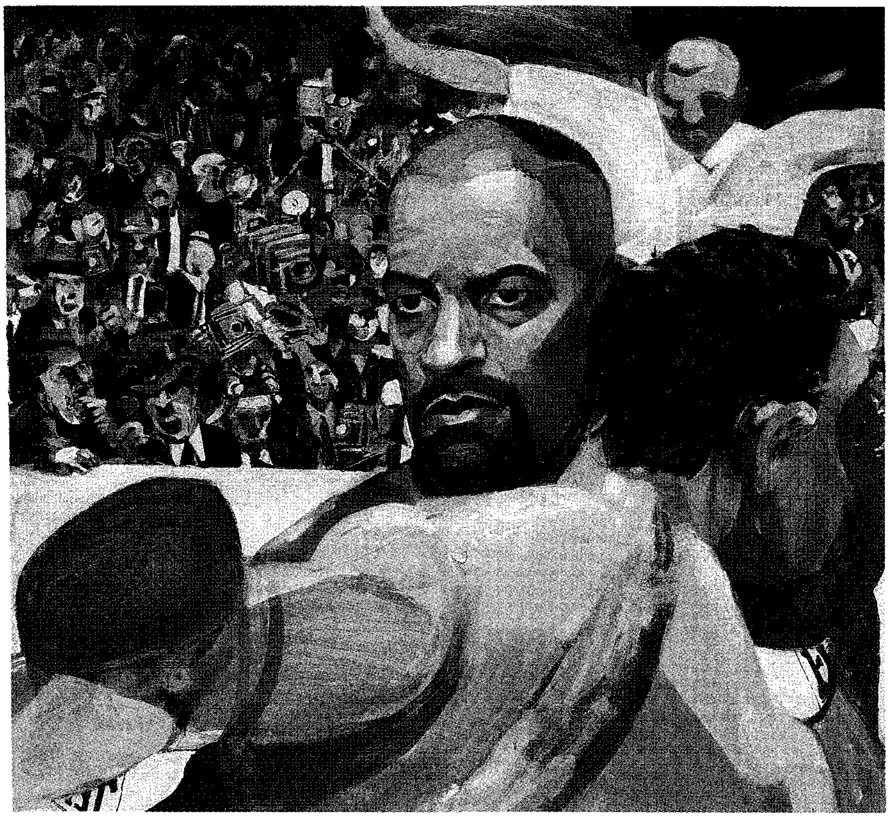
Angela's Ashes—It's not a dud, exactly—it has some flavor and an impressively dank, rain-soaked pallor—but this Alan Parker adaptation of Frank McCourt's memoir doesn't dramatize the material with much force. Parker keeps moving ahead through McCourt's boyhood in Limerick (he wants to get his hero to America); he doesn't develop anything in depth, so the stories of poverty and desperate resourcefulness have a thin, almost generic feeling of Irish bitterness. The three young actors (Joe Breen, Ciaran Owens, and Michael Legge) who play Frank at different phases of his life all have wonderful faces, but Emily Watson and Robert Carlyle, as McCourt's suffering mom and ne'er-do-well father, are trapped by static roles.—*David Denby* (Coronet Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.)

Anna and the King—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Chelsea Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 64th and 2nd, Village East Cinemas, and Ziegfeld.)

Being John Malkovich—An out-of-work puppeteer (John Cusack) and his pet-loving girlfriend (Cameron Diaz) take turns entering the head of the actor John Malkovich, where they remain for fifteen minutes at a time, experiencing everything he does, before being deposited with a whoosh beside the New Jersey Turnpike. This fantastic weightless comedy, which was written by Charlie Kaufman and directed by Spike Jonze, plays with notions of celebrity worship and gender reversal, but the best thing about it is the genially deadpan style of its most absurd inventions.—*D.D.* (11/22/99) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 72nd Street East, State, and Village Theatre VII.)

The Cider House Rules—The director Lasse Hallström has come to specialize in grown-up movies about kids and teen-agers, especially of the luckless variety. This new picture, adapted by John Irving from his own novel, teems with scores of the little beggars; the tale begins at a snowbound orphanage in Maine, where Dr. Larch (Michael Caine) tends to the bodies and souls of the unwanted, even extending his skills to an illegal abortion practice. His protégé is Homer Wells (Tobey Maguire), who is set to follow in Larch's footsteps until those of Candy (Charlize Theron) appear. Homer departs for the wide world, where he learns about apples and sex, in that order. As an older and wiser man he returns to his destiny, although the getting of that wisdom has been oddly unengaging. The orphan scenes have an imaginative solidity that fades as the film proceeds, and you can't work out whether the gruelling social issues, like incest and abortion, are the subject of the movie or simply ballast. As apple movies go, this one lacks a core.—*Anthony Lane* (12/13/99) (Angelika Film Center, Gotham Cinema, Kips Bay Theatre, and Lincoln Square.)

Cradle Will Rock—In 1937, Orson Welles and John Houseman tried—and, just barely, succeeded—in putting on Marc Blitzstein's "The Cradle Will Rock," a musical drama about prostitutes, unions, and a lot of other things that musicals were never meant to mention. Tim Robbins's picture—his most crowded, and probably his best to date—tells the story, or the interlocking stories, of that supercharged age. Houseman (Cary Elwes) and Welles (Angus Macfadyen) are merely part of the procession; we also get the saga of Nelson Rockefeller (John Cusack) paying Diego Rivera (Ruben Blades) to paint a giant mural and then having it destroyed. As if in homage to that lost work, Robbins operates on the mural principle, moving gaily and with high technical fluency from penniless actors (John Turturro and Emily Watson) to sincere socialites like Countess La Grange (Vanessa Redgrave) and a ravishing Fascist named Margherita Sarfatti (Susan Sarandon). It could have been a mess, and there are patches where Robbins's inspiration wears a little thin; yet, all in all, his ambitious tolerance pays off, and you are happy to be hauled toward the grand—and unashamedly theatrical—finale. With Joan Cusack and Bill Murray as bashful anti-Communists, Hank Azaria as Blitzstein, and—best of all—Cherry Jones as Hallie Flanagan, the smiling mainstay of the Federal Theatre in its darkest hour.—*A.L.* (12/13/99)



Denzel Washington, in "Hurricane," opening December 29.

RICCARDO VECCHIO

’Twas the night before Christmas

when all through the house

not a creature was stirring

not even a mouse.

Happy Holidays!

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(Angelika Film Center, Gotham Cinema, Kips Bay Theatre, and Lincoln Square.)

Death Race 2000 (1975)—Low-budget sci-fi, from an often amusing suspense script by Robert Thom and Charles B. Griffith, directed by Paul Bartel in his ingratiatingly tacky, sophomoric manner. Bartel seems to have an instinctive kinky comic-book style; the picture zips along, and there's a flip craziness about it—it's an ideal drive-in movie. In the role of a legendary driver in a killer race—points are scored for every pedestrian run down—David Carradine has star presence, and his easy, confident manner gives the film some class; he's very elegant in his black leather clothes and black leather cape. Sylvester Stallone is rather funny as the slobbish, stupid villain, who's always expostulating in anger or disgust.—*Pauline Kael* (American Museum of the Moving Image; Jan. 1.)

Dogma—Kevin Smith, lord of the zero budget ("Clerks," "Chasing Amy"), has decided to stretch himself with this sprawling, star-stuffed fantasy on the trifling theme of good and evil. His unlikely plot features Matt Damon and Ben Affleck as a couple of renegade angels who spot a chance to reënter heaven and thus terminate the universe. Up against them is a rank of supernatural forces—played by Alan Rickman, Chris Rock, Jason Lee, and Salma Hayek—a perplexed earthling (Linda Fiorentino), and a couple of unwitting prophets, played by the grungy Jason Mewes and the bearded Smith himself, back by popular demand from his previous pictures. The result has some great lines, but it's a muddle that turns into a mess; there have been cries of distress about the film's attack on organized religion, but no self-respecting church could seriously claim to be damaged by this extended skit. With Alanis Morissette as God.—*A.L.* (11/15/99) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, 59th Street East Cinema, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

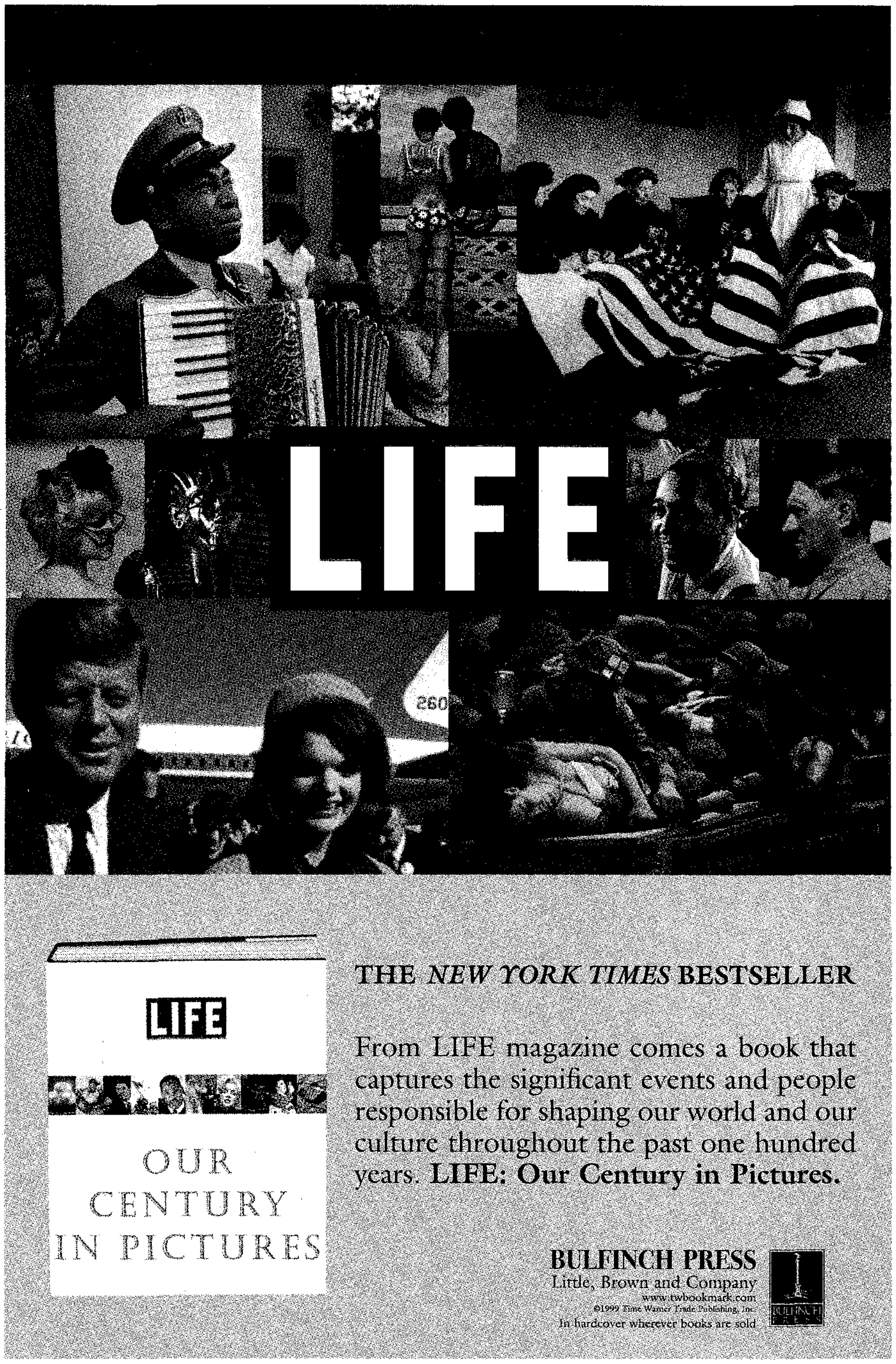
The End of the Affair—Adultery during the blitz, with rain and gray ash everywhere and buildings falling down around the furtive lovers. Neil Jordan's adaptation of Graham Greene's novel is suitably intense and sombre. But Greene's story, by its very nature, cannot explode into dramatic life on the screen. The principal players are the writer Maurice Bendrix (Ralph Fiennes), a stand-in for Greene himself; a married woman, Sarah (Julianne Moore); and God, who is ever so hard to cast. Bendrix addresses Him, with elaborate loathing, and Sarah needs Him, but exactly what faith means to her is a mystery. The movie is constructed like a puzzle with a metaphysical solution—it's intelligent but muffled and slightly remote. Stephen Rea gives an abashed, beautiful performance as the cuckolded husband, and Ian Hart is the Dickensian detective who spies on everyone.—*D. D.* (12/6/99) (Lincoln Square, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII.)

End of Days—Arnold Schwarzenegger's millennial "Omen" flick—the Devil comes to New York to mate with a virgin on New Year's Eve—looks and plays like leftover high-testosterone eighties filmmaking. There's nothing here that breaks any new action ground, and the performance by Gabriel Byrne as the Prince of Darkness is embarrassing.—*Bruce Diones* (Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, Union Square, Waverly 1 and 2, and Ziegfeld.)

Flawless—Robert DeNiro plays a homophobic ex-security guard and stroke victim who's forced to take singing lessons from a lonely, flamboyant drag-queen neighbor, played by Philip Seymour Hoffman, in director Joel Schumacher's bizarre idea of dramatic entertainment. While the actors do a good job portraying characters that are borderline stereotypes, not much can be done with a script that is peppered with we're-all-in-this-together cheerleading and banal setups (Hoffman teaches music to pay for a sex-change operation). By the time menacing drug dealers are introduced (don't ask) and the bullets fly, both men will have to learn to live and love without judgment. The film should come with a group-hug warning.—*B.D.* (First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Village Theatre VII.)

The Green Mile—Is there such a thing as commercial pedantry? If there is, this movie embodies it. Frank Darabont's adaptation of Stephen King's 1996 serial novel is a three-hour-and-eight-minute religious allegory about a black convict (Michael Clarke Duncan), a white prison guard (Tom Hanks), and a mouse. The convict is meant to be Jesus Christ, and the mouse, which gets crushed and then reborn, is meant to represent survival—or perhaps Life Itself. Darabont lays out his meagre death-row story with lethal thoroughness, and the miracles arrive on schedule. The movie blinds itself with the grandiosity of its illusions. On the one hand, it preaches love; on the other, it tries to excite the audience with the convulsed body and flaming head of a man strapped into an electric chair. By the end, the sanctimonious hypocrisy is all but unbearable.—*D.D.* (12/20/99) (Astor Plaza, Chelsea West, Coronet Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.)

The Insider—A self-important but juicily entertaining public-affairs melodrama about big-time journalism and corporate villainy. Russell Crowe plays the real-life whistle-blower Jeffrey Wigand, who in 1995 had devastating things to reveal about his former employer, tobacco giant Brown & Williamson, and Al Pacino is the bristling "60 Minutes" producer Lowell Bergman, who was stymied in bringing Wigand's information to the public. They are meant to represent two kinds of personal honor arrayed against corporate game-players, including Michael Gambon as a tobacco executive and Christopher Plummer as a mildly satirized Mike Wallace. Director Michael Mann creates a



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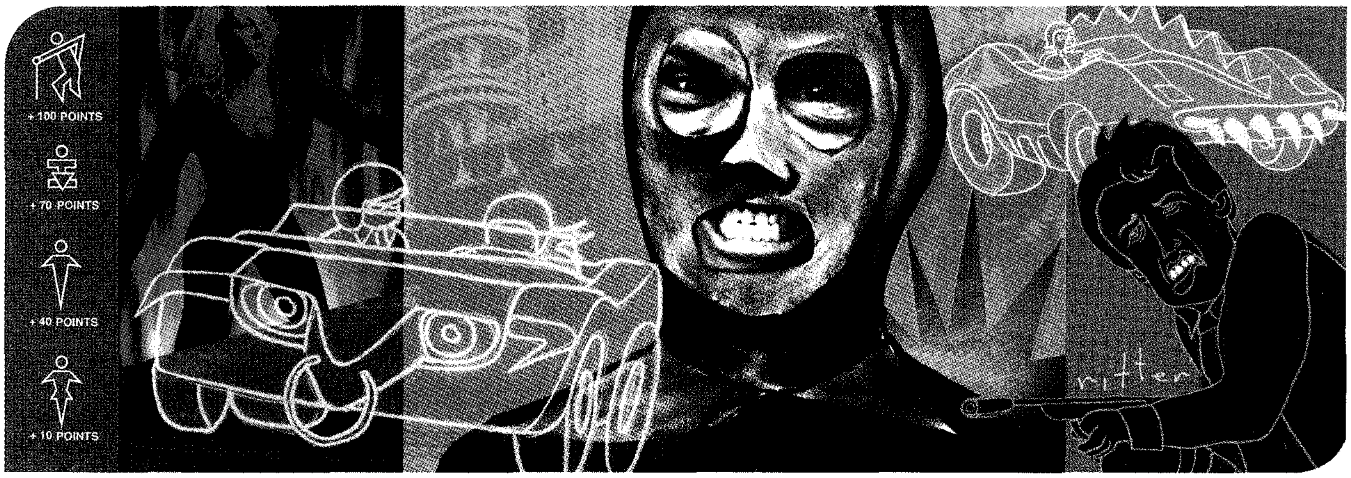
rising line of tension and paranoia which leads to a muted, not entirely reassuring ending.—*D.D.* (11/8/99) (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, East 86th Street Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, State, and Union Square.)



At the American Museum of the Moving Image, on January 1, Paul Bartel's sci-fi classic, "Death Race 2000."

JOHN RITTER

Liberty Heights—The new Barry Levinson movie is set in the fall of 1954, in the working-class Jewish neighborhood of Baltimore, and all is not well in the Kurtzman family: young Ben (Ben Foster) is falling for the radiant Sylvia (Rebekah Johnson), a black girl in his class. To Ben's mother (Bebe Neuwirth), this is a personal insult, although his father (Joe Mantegna) is too busy running a numbers racket out of his burlesque theatre to take much notice. At the same time, their older son, Van (Adrien Brody), is pursuing an icy Wasp goddess (Carolyn Murphy) with gratifying success. This sneaky breaching of cultural and ethnic frontiers is Levinson's favorite theme; he finds comic alliances where other directors would sniff for confrontation, and he skillfully avoids the traps of sentimental softness.—*A.L.* (11/29/99) (First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.)

Magnolia—In Paul Thomas Anderson's new movie, the characters break down, fall apart, and denounce themselves and others. "Magnolia" consists of multiple vignettes set in the San Fernando Valley, but since there's no common theme, the picture becomes a kind of mad crackup derby. Much of the material is earnest Arthur Miller-type stuff about how we can't escape the past, we can't escape the evil we've done, we all need to be truthful with one another, and so on. The ideas are banal, but Anderson ("Boogie Nights") plays each sequence in real time and cuts among them with remarkable fluency, and the actors have some tremendous arialike moments—especially Julianne Moore as an adulterous young wife, John C. Reilly as an angelic cop looking for love, and Tom Cruise as some sort of sex guru who hosts a cable-TV show called "Seduce and Destroy." With Jason Robards, Philip Seymour Hoffman, and William H. Macy.—*D.D.* (12/20/99) (Cinema 3rd Avenue, Lincoln Square, Union Square.)

Mansfield Park—It's Jane Austen, but not as we know it. Aware, perhaps, that this is one of the sterner and less loved of the novels, the director and screenwriter Patricia Rozema has taken shameless liberties and encouraged her actors to do the same. The plot is simplified but intact: impoverished Fanny Price (Frances O'Connor) is brought to live with her wealthier relations, among them Sir Thomas Bertram (Harold Pinter) and his son Edmund (Jonny Lee Miller). Their lives are churned up by the arrival of the dashing Crawfords—Henry (Alessandro Nivola) and Mary (Embeth Davidtz), both of whom have various designs upon Fanny. Everyone in this movie seems to fancy everyone else: how very different from the home life of the late Miss Austen. The picture, however willful, has a welcome audacity and a hard, discomforting look that dispels the plushness of ordinary costume drama.—*A.L.* (11/29/99) (Angelika Film Center and Paris.)

Miss Julie—August Strindberg's late-nineteenth-century play—ostensibly about the passion of a nobleman's beautiful daughter (Saffron Burrows) for a servant (Peter Mullan), but more focussed on the powerful class issues between them—gets a blunt and essentially wrongheaded treatment by director Mike Figgis ("Leaving Las Vegas," "The Loss of Sexual Innocence"). Most of the action takes place in the cavernous kitchen of a Swedish castle, and Figgis is to be commended for not opening up the play into a series of repressed arguments in the brambles (as a James Ivory film would do). It's been shot quickly (three weeks) by handheld cameras, and the jarring, eccentric angles give the film a woozy motion that breaks the actors' intensity. Burrows and Mullan do fine work with their wicked, taunting roles—it couldn't have been easy with cameras practically up their noses—but the movie has no momentum, and Figgis, whose best films are packed with sexual energy, barely captures a decent erotic charge between this warring couple.—*B.D.* (Angelika Film Center and First & 62nd Cinemas.)

Ride with the Devil—Two young friends (Skeet Ulrich and Tobey Maguire) are caught up in the rough edges of the Civil War at the Kansas-Missouri border; instead of grand campaigns, we get woodland skirmishes and deceitful ambushes, and an uneasy sense that the moral advantage is constantly changing hands. Confronted for the first time with action scenes, the director Ang Lee acquits himself honorably, and his uncanny feel for the moodiness of landscape remains undimmed. The cast is a touch underpowered; this is a film about young men in deep trouble, but they look more blanked out than coarsened by their plight. With Jeffrey Wright as a trusty servant and Jewel, the pop star, making a fine début as a lusty widow. Thankfully, she waits until the credits before bursting into song.—*A.L.* (Lincoln Square.)

Sleepy Hollow—Tim Burton's retelling of Washington Irving's old tale is impressively sinister—the light is invariably a sombre, chill gray; foul mists, like a spreading poison, envelop the streets and houses. But, like any stylized look that lacks sufficient human interest, the atmosphere of "Sleepy Hollow" grows monotonous. Johnny Depp is charming but weightless as Ichabod Crane, rationalist seeker of truth. The other characters—men with pale, pinched faces in frock coats and wigs, women in Empire-style gowns with corseted breasts—make stunning first impressions, but then they start talking gibberish and we lose interest.—*D.D.* (11/22/99) (42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

Sweet and Lowdown—Sean Penn, in cream-colored suits and matching hat, a cigarette dangling from his lips, gives one of the best performances ever seen in a Woody Allen film. He plays Emmet Ray, the notorious (and made-up) jazz guitarist from the thirties, a great artist who was also a worm and a loser. Emmet handles his instrument almost as well as his idol Django Reinhardt, but he's the victim of his own neuroses and obsessions. His not knowing himself at all is turned into a joke, but it's also played for pathos—incomprehension is Emmet's soulfulness, mysteriously linked to his elegant playing. With the English actress Samantha Morton, hatted and crumpet-faced, her body hidden in a shapeless dress, as the mute girl who falls for Emmet. Golden-hued cinematography by Zhao Fei. The contemporary guitarists Howard Alden and Bucky Pizzarelli do the playing. In all, one of Allen's finest achievements.—*D.D.* (12/6/99) (42nd Street E Walk, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

Topsy-Turvy—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Paris.)

Toy Story 2—A rarity—a sequel that's better than the original. Director John Lasseter's achievement is a stunning marriage of gorgeous detail work (bright and textured backgrounds that evoke the same sense of wonder that made "A Bug's Life" so beautiful) and computer-generated characters with remarkably lively features. To this he's added some crackerjack storytelling, filled with action and lighthearted humor, which sets this film apart from many previous computer-animated features. The premise of the film—what happens to old toys when children don't want them anymore—gives Lasseter plenty of leeway to take his characters beyond the children's room and into a breathtakingly alive adult world.—*B.D.* (Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Sutton 1 and 2, and Village East Cinemas.)

Tumbleweeds—The camera is relaxed, moving with the characters, but still the great English actress Janet McTeer, in her first major film performance, bursts the frame with her vitality. This actress has more body, bigger eyes, a freer laugh—more soul, too—than we are used to seeing in movies. Her Mary Jo, a slightly frayed Southern working-class beauty, depends on her ability to attract men. But when she jumps into relationships, she's too honest to keep her mouth shut, and soon she has to jump out of them, dragging her little daughter (Kimberly

Brown) along with her. A small picture, but a fully felt one. Written by Angela Shelton and Gavin O'Connor, who also plays Mary Jo's irritable boyfriend and directs, with an easy hand.—*D.D.* (First & 62nd Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, and Union Square.)

The War Zone—The hyperkinetic actor Tim Roth joins the ranks of other sometimes-brilliant cinema rebels (Sean Penn, Gary Oldman) by directing, rather soberly, his first film. The story, about an incestuous relationship between a father and daughter that turns a seemingly happy family into a war zone, has a dark, lyrical quality that's especially disturbing. Roth and his cinematographer, Seamus McGarvey, create a spare, haunting mood that lulls the viewer into accepting the household suffering without the usual histrionics and outrage. The minimal dialogue (by screenwriter Alexander Stuart, based on his novel) leaves much of the characters' motivations in a powerful blur, and the monstrously believable performances from the little-known cast (Ray Winstone and Tilda Swinton, among others) have real power. The film offers a stark and convincing glimpse at the banality behind a family's unwillingness to speak about the truth.—*B.D.* (Union Square.)

The World Is Not Enough—Once again, 007 (Pierce Brosnan) is called upon to save the world's natural resources; environmental viewers everywhere will applaud his efforts to save a Turkish oil pipeline. With him is Dr. Christmas Jones (Denise Richards), who is big in warheads; against him is an unstable skinhead called Renard (Robert Carlyle); underneath him is Elektra King (Sophie Marceau), a shady billionairess. Much of the movie is airless and oddly muddled; the opening quarter of an hour, however, which surges into a London boat chase, provides as much fun as you can legally have in a public place. Directed by Michael Apted.—*A.L.* (11/29/99) (Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, Union Square, and Waverly.)

ALSO PLAYING

ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER (11/22/99): Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **AMERICAN BEAUTY** (9/20/99): BAM Rose Cinemas, Beekman, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, State, and Village Theatre VII . . . . **AMERICAN MOVIE:** Film Forum. . . . **BICENTENNIAL MAN:** Astor Plaza, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Kips Bay Theatre, 42nd Street E Walk, and Union Square. . . . **THE BONE COLLECTOR:** 42nd Street E Walk, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, and Park & 86th Street Cinemas. . . . **BOYS DON'T CRY** (10/18-25/99): Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Union Square. . . . **BUENA VISTA SOCIAL CLUB:** Screening Room. . . . **CARTOON NOIR:** Cinema Village. . . . **DEUCE BIGALOW: MALE GIGOLO:** Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Murray Hill Cinemas, Sutton 1 and 2, and Village East Cinemas. . . . **THE EMPEROR AND THE ASSASSIN:** Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **FELICIA'S JOURNEY:** Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema. . . . **FIGHT CLUB** (10/18-25/99): Criterion Center. . . . **42 UP:** Cinema Village. . . . **HELL'S KITCHEN:** Criterion Center and Village East Cinemas. . . . **HOLY SMOKE:** Lincoln Square. . . . **THE LIMEY** (10/11/99): Cinema 3rd Avenue and Cinema Village. . . . **THE MESSENGER: THE STORY OF JOAN OF ARC:** 19th Street East 6. . . . **POKÉMON: THE FIRST MOVIE:** Lincoln Square and Union Square. . . . **PRINCESS MONONOKE:** Village East Cinemas. . . . **ROSETTA** (11/8/99): Quad Cinema. . . . **THE STRAIGHT STORY** (11/1/99): Eastside Playhouse, and Village East Cinema. . . . **STUART LITTLE:** Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Union Square. . . . **VIRTUAL SEXUALITY:** 42nd Street E Walk. . . . **WALLOWITCH & ROSS:** Cinema Village.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Films about the future. Dec. 26: "Sleeper" (1973, Woody Allen) and "Planet of the Apes" (1968, Franklin J. Schaffner). . . . Jan. 1: "Death Race 2000" (†) and "Mad Max" (1979, George Miller). . . . Jan. 2: "Things to Come" (1936, William Menzies) and "Demolition Man" (1993, Marco Brambilla).

BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770)—Dec. 22: "Second Circle" (1990, Alexander Sokurov). . . . Dec. 23: "Blue Collar" (1978, Paul Schrader). . . . Dec. 24-25: "Monty Python's Life of Brian" (1979, Terry Jones). . . . Dec. 26: "The Big Clock" (1948, John Farrow). . . . Dec. 27: "Lost Horizon" (1937, Frank Capra). . . . Dec. 28: "City of Women" (1980, Federico Fellini; in Italian). . . . Dec. 30: "Bad Lieutenant" (1992, Abel Ferrara). . . . Dec. 31-Jan. 1: "Monty Python's Meaning of Life" (1983, Terry Jones and Terry Gilliam). . . . Jan. 2: "Sabrina" (1954, Billy Wilder). . . . Jan. 3: "You Can't Take It with You" (1938, Frank Capra). . . . Jan. 4: "Happy Together" (1997, Wong Kar-Wai). . . . ¶ "The Sound of Silents," a monthly program of silent films with live musical accompaniment by pianist Donald Sosin. Dec. 29: "Camille" (1921, Ray Smallwood), with Rudolph Valentino.

Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—A program of films celebrating Columbia Pictures' seventy-fifth anniversary. Dec. 22-24: "Picnic" (1955, Joshua Logan) and "Bell, Book and Candle" (1958, Richard Quine). . . . Dec. 25-26: "Bye Bye Birdie" (1963, George Sidney) and "Cat Ballou" (1965, Elliot Silverstein). . . . Dec. 27: "The Awful Truth" (1937, Leo McCarey) and "Holiday" (1938, George Cukor). . . . Dec. 28: "Cover Girl" (1944, Charles Vidor) and "Pal Joey" (1957, George Sidney). . . . Dec. 29: "The 3 Stooges & Company" and "All Cartoon! All Columbia!". . . . Dec. 30-Jan. 6: "Dr. Strangelove" (1964, Stanley Kubrick). . . . ¶ From Dec. 29: "Highway" (1999, Sergey Dvortsevoy) and "Paradise" (1995, Dvortsevoy).

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—Jan. 4: "Cold Cuts" (1980, Bertrand Blier; in French).

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—"End of the Century Selections," a series of classic films to mark the new millennium. Dec. 23 and Dec. 27: "Pather Panchali" (1955, Satyajit Ray; in Bengali). . . . Dec. 26-27: "Lawrence of Arabia" (1962, David Lean). . . . Dec. 26 and Dec. 30: "Taxi Lisboa" (1996, Wolf Gaudlitz; in Portuguese, German, and Italian). . . . Dec. 30: "New York, New York" (1977, Martin Scorsese). . . . ¶ "Children of Berlin: Cultural Developments 1989-1999." Jan. 2: "120 Days of Bottrop" (1997, Christolph Schlingensief; in German). . . . Jan. 4: "Sun Alley" (1999, Leander Haubmann; in German). ¶ Through April 2000: A program of silent films, 1893 to 1928, from the museum's collection.

Museum of Television and Radio, 25 W. 52nd St. (621-6800)—Through Jan. 30: "Andy's Funhouse: The Andy Kaufman Special" (1979). (Tuesdays and Wednesdays at 1, Thursdays at 6, Fridays at 7, and Saturdays and Sundays at 1.). . . . ¶ Through Feb. 13: "Super Bowl: Super Showcase for Commercials." Frank Gifford narrates the ascendance of television's premier venue for new advertisements.

The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (332-2100)—The films of Michael Caine. Dec. 22: "Educating Rita" (1983, Lewis Gilbert) and "Alfie" (1966, Gilbert). . . . Dec. 23: "Hannah and Her Sisters" (1986, Woody Allen) and "Little Voice" (1998, Mark Herman). . . . ¶ Dec. 24-30: "Pink Narcissus" (1971, Anonymous). . . . ¶ From Dec. 31: "Close-Up" (1990, Abbos Kiarostami; in Persian).

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Contemporary Spanish cinema. All films are in Spanish or Catalan with English subtitles. Dec. 22: "Actresses" (1997, Ventura Pons) and "Caresses" (1997, Pons). . . . Dec. 23-24: "Pepe Guindo" (1988, Manuel Iborra), "Washington Wolves" (1999, Mariano Barroso), and "Black Tears" (1999, Ricardo Franco and Fernando Bauluz). . . . ¶ Dec. 26: The silent version of "Peter Pan" (1924) will be shown accompanied by the Flower City Society Orchestra playing a new score by Herbert Brenon. . . . ¶ A series of films about the apocalypse. Dec. 29 and Dec. 31: "Mad Max" (1979, George Miller) and "Mad Max 2" (1981, George Miller). . . . Dec. 30-31: "Strange Days" (1995, Kathryn Bigelow) and "The Rapture" (1991, Michael Tolkin). . . . ¶ "100 Years of the Future." Jan 1: "La Jetée" (1962, Chris Marker; in French), "A Trip to the Moon" (1962, George Méliès; in French), and "Dark Star" (1971, John Carpenter). . . . Jan. 3: "World Without End" (1956, Edward Bernds) and "Starship Troopers" (1997, Paul Verhoeven). . . . Jan. 4: "The Shape of Things to Come" (1936, William Menzies) and "The Last Man on Earth" (1964, Ubaldo Ragona and Sidney Salkow; in Italian).

THEATRE ADDRESSES

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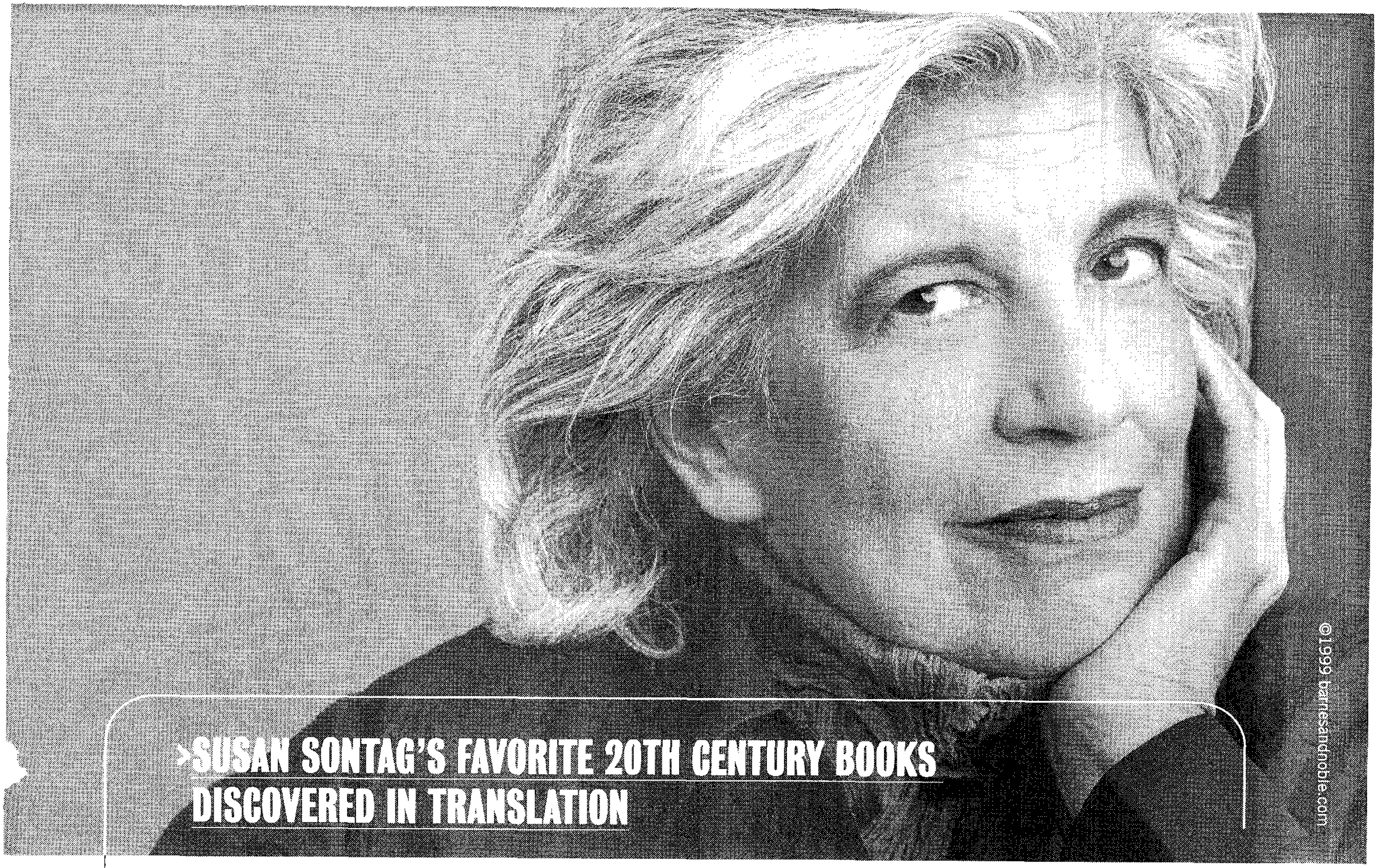
(For show times, call 777-FILM, except where noted.)

American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077).
Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770).
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 66th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.



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THE NEW YORKER

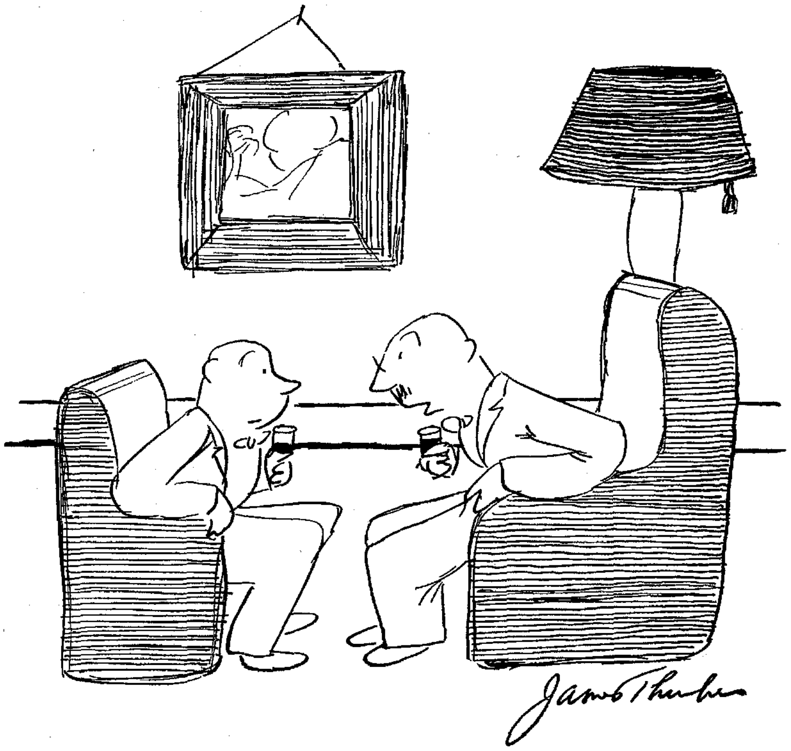
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

The Big One.

ON the brink of the New Year, we called on a tall, nervous friend of ours. He had fallen to worrying as to what, sixty years from now, at the turn of the next century, people will call the ponderous year that bobs up on the calendar, and the years that follow it. Will they, for example, say "two thousand and one" or "twenty hundred and one" when speaking of the year 2001? That figure, he pointed out to us, has a fictive and implausible look and comes awkwardly to the tongue no matter how you say it. There is, our friend insisted, a bleak and disheartening B.C. quality in the sight and sound of the forlorn years to come, reminiscent of those gloomy ages when man, finding he could stand erect, gibbered in foolish glee. Our friend showed us one or two dates he had written down, just to see how they would look: May 3, 2000, October 17, 2040. There is, he feels, an alarming phonyness about these arrangements of numerals: such a spurious-sounding cycle must surely fall down of its own unwieldy improbability. We mixed drinks for both of us and reminded him—knowing his age—that there isn't a chance in a million he will be on earth to blow a horn on the perilous night of December 31, 1999, since he would have to live to be a hundred and four to do so. He assured us he wasn't thinking about himself but about his little daughter, who will be only sixty-nine in 2000 and whose children, in all probability, will be in their forties, the very prime of life. We tried to cheer him up by telling him our mother's aunt Ida, a former deaconess in the First M.E. Church, had written us to say the world is coming to an end in 1944, but he refused to be consoled.

—from JAMES THURBER,
The Talk of the Town, December 30, 1939



AROUND CITY HALL

A mayoral gadfly strikes again.

CHRISTMAS comes but once a year, which is perhaps why Mayor Rudolph Giuliani has seemed, even more than usual lately, a character out of Dickens—well, O.K., Scrooge. First, he announced that the city would move ahead with plans to throw uncoöperative families out of homeless shelters. Then he threatened to clear New York's streets of homeless people by arresting any who would not go to those same shelters. Putting aside the merits of the Mayor's position, a lot of New Yorkers wondered why he would want to take such steps in this most sentimental of seasons. Steve Banks, head of the Legal Aid Society's Homeless Rights Project, has a pretty simple answer: "Absolute and utter heartlessness."

Banks is a slight man, with thinning brown hair, a full beard, and the calm, unyielding tenacity that one associates with religious martyrs. Last week, he talked about the Mayor's actions—and his own campaign to thwart them—over a cup of tea at Ellen's, a coffee shop near City Hall. "I agree with the Mayor that in a civilized society sidewalks aren't for sleeping, bedrooms are," he said. "But you've got to provide the resources for the bedrooms." He went on, "Basically, we're criminalizing being poor."

Banks, who is forty-two, has headed the Homeless Rights Project since the mid-eighties. Not a single day has passed during that time when he has not had at least one lawsuit, and often several, pending against the city. Usually, he wins, as he did recently in his arguments against the first part of Giuliani's plan—the city will have to wait to start kicking families out of shelters. In the lower Manhattan courtroom where Banks secured the delay, the city's lawyers did not take yet another defeat at his hands calmly. "Ridiculous" and "outrageous," Leonard Koerner, the chief assistant corporation counsel, spluttered to the judge. "I understand the tactics. I welcome the creativity. But it has no application to the rule of law."

In his campaign to force the city to do what it does not want to do, Banks has been willing to try just about anything. Once, he convinced a judge that she should hold four high-ranking Dinkins administration officials in contempt of court and, as punishment, order them to spend a night in the same city offices where dozens of homeless families were being left to sleep. The contempt ruling was eventually upheld by the state's highest court, but by then, fortuitously for the officials, they had all moved on to new jobs.

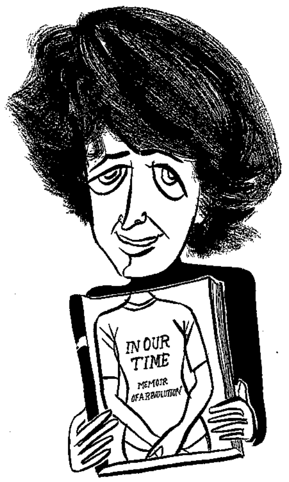
Over the years, Banks's lawsuits have done a lot to change the way New York deals with the homeless; among other things, they have compelled the city to shut down its worst welfare hotels and to take steps to insure that families are not left to languish in welfare offices. Banks is now on his third mayor, having started to litigate when Ed Koch was in City Hall. He argues that the time city officials put into fighting him could be used more wisely. "Too much effort is spent defending what's done rather than looking for the solutions," he said, in his usual measured tone.

Banks realizes that the Mayor sees him as basically an irritant, but, in a sense, that is not so very far from how he sees himself. "The highest calling," he said, summing up the principles that have sustained him through years of litigation, "is to do justice—to trouble the comfortable and comfort the troubled." —ELIZABETH KOLBERT

INK

Nostalgia for the bygone days of feminist family feuding.

When the feminists of the nineteen-sixties coined the expression "Sisterhood is powerful," they did not have in mind one typical characteristic of the relationship between female siblings—the way that sisters fight all the time. Susan Brownmiller, in her entertaining new history of the women's-liberation movement, "In Our Time," reminds readers that the sixties-era feminists, for all their high achievements, did their fair share of feuding.



Susan Brownmiller

Three decades later, a certain nostalgia has set in, and when Brownmiller appeared at a Barnes & Noble on the Upper West Side the other day and found some of her onetime adversaries in the audience, she appeared delighted to see them. She punctuated her reading—about the daylong feminist occupation of the offices of the *Ladies' Home Journal*, in 1970—and a question-and-answer session that followed with yelps of recognition. "Judith Hennessee, who wrote the biography of Betty Friedan—I picked a fight with her!" Brownmiller cried. "Alix Kates Shulman, the novelist—one of the best feminists, although we disagreed all the time!" She spotted Michela Griffo, a radical lesbian whom she'd offended back in 1970. "Michela, you want to say something divisive?" she shouted. "I never agreed with anything you said!" Griffo shouted back fondly.

"Visionaries are difficult people," Brownmiller said later, at a party given in her honor. "Put eight visionaries in a room, and you will get eight different visions." Her book does, she said, give considerable play to some of the wackier elements of the feminist movement, such as Shulamith Firestone's erratic behavior during the *Ladies' Home Journal* sit-in. Firestone tried to assault the magazine's editor, a man, yelling, "We can do it—he's small." Brownmiller maintained that she was entitled to chronicle these goofy moments, "because I am doing it in love and celebration of the movement. Movements are always like that. Think about Freud and Jung and Adler, always at each other's throats. Or Stalin, arranging to have Trotsky killed."

All that scrapping was simply the sign of a vital movement—something that Brownmiller says she sees no hint of these days. "I feel sorry for young women today," she said. "Some young women are committed feminists, but it is hard to be an activist and a militant in nonmilitant times." (Younger women wishing for a movement of their own might have been made wary by the answer Brownmiller gave at the reading when she was asked about how feminism affected her ability to negotiate relations with men. "Well, I don't know if I did negotiate those relations," she said. "I did not know that if I wrote a book on rape"—"Against Our Will," which was published in 1975—"my popularity would plummet. Once, I said to Robin Morgan"—a former editor of *Ms.*—"that I had been alone since I wrote 'Against Our Will,' and she said, 'What did you expect?' ")

Brownmiller's party was attended by only two men and a crowd of women with hair in various shades of gray and gold. The host was Marlene Sanders, a former ABC and CBS News correspondent, who is identified in "In Our Time" as the movement's only ally on television. (Sanders indicated that there were still battles to be won for women's rights when a guest asked why she no longer appeared on television. "I'm too old," she growled. "Though I'm the same age as Dan Rather.") Guests included friends of Brownmiller's from the human-rights contingent, such as

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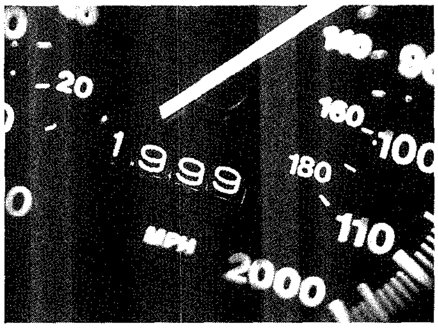

IGNITION

They met outside an L. A. club we don't have to name—you know, the one still at the height of its fame. The landscape architect finished a gig in a funk-rock band called Twisted Twig. The Net entrepreneur shot the whole show to air on her site as a Web video. They crossed each other's paths in the club's parking lot, both eyeing the Isuzu VehiCROSS in the VIP spot. It was love at first sight on that star-filled night—between he and she and the SUV. Within hours the pair had plotted forever, and purchased a VehiCROSS for the endeavor.

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40

SHIFT

The following weeks were boredom-free as they cruised 'round town in their Isuzu SUV, and soon came the day to enter Y2K. She was plotting a seaside bash. He had a Tahoe party he was required to crash. You see, a really slick music exec was dangling the promise of a check, so for Twig's sake it was a scene he had to make. She told him she'd go along for the ride, though her enthusiasm for the evening was less than bona fide.

KEEP READING

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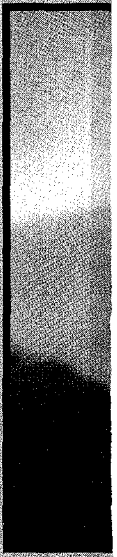

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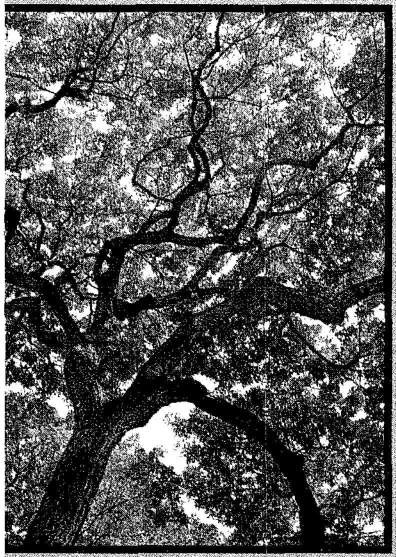

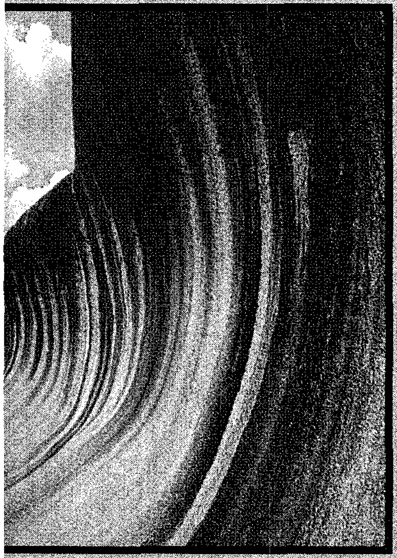

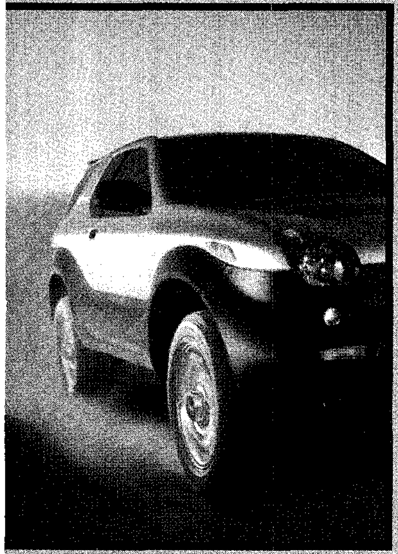

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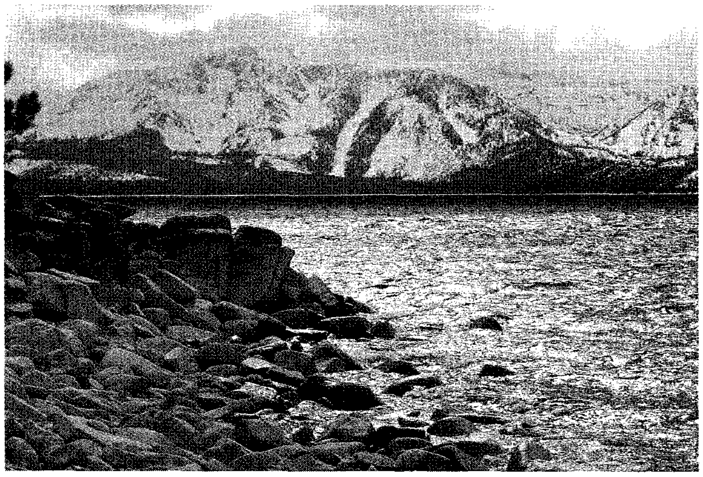
DRIVE

The L.A. skies were full of sun as they left that day for their Tahoe run. But just outside the Sierra Nevada chain, the clouds unleashed snow that fell just like rain. Suddenly their worldview turned to white and soon the skies filled with night.



Just beyond a diner called Mother Load, they took a wrong turn and lost the main road. The terrain soon started getting rougher, but the VehiCROSS was by far the tougher. It didn't take long for them to decide that this was a night meant for a ride. So what if they didn't make the record mogul's den, they had a powertrain warranty that would get them to 2010.

ACCELERATION

The midnight hour was approaching fast, so they stopped for their own private blast. He steered the VehiCROSS up the nearest peak, and kicked off the festivities with a kiss on the cheek. At 11:59, Mother Nature stopped the snow and raised the curtain on the sky below. He quickly cued up a Cole Porter tune, and joined her outside under the nearly full moon. In a celebration to rival Times Square, they danced up a storm in the clear mountain air. No Dick Clark and no party hat, they created their own magic in nothing flat. Their only resolution for the coming year: to live and drive in the highest gear.

DESTINATION

Back home in L. A. the very next day, he heard from a friend of the party without end. Uh oh, thought our no-show, I hope our record deal isn't a no-go. "No bash, no cash," the executive said, and our hero's hopes went totally dead. But then came a call from a rival music label. Hooray! They had more room in their recording stable.

"You know what this means for the two of us," he cried. "Another VehiCROSS," she eagerly replied.

And the rest is history as they sometimes say, or it will be soon after Y2K.

ISUZU

Go farther.

Lucy Komisar, and from the feminist movement, such as Joyce Johnson and Alix Kates Shulman. "We've disagreed, but that's history," said Shulman, glowing. "One of the consolations of history is that it's history." There was also a delegation from Brownmiller's regular Saturday-night poker game, and one from the women's Ping-Pong league in which she plays every Sunday. "That's what an old feminist does to keep active," Brownmiller said. "I do all those things in lieu of a women's movement."

—REBECCA MEAD

DEPT. OF TASTE

How many industrial designers does it take to make a cup of tea?

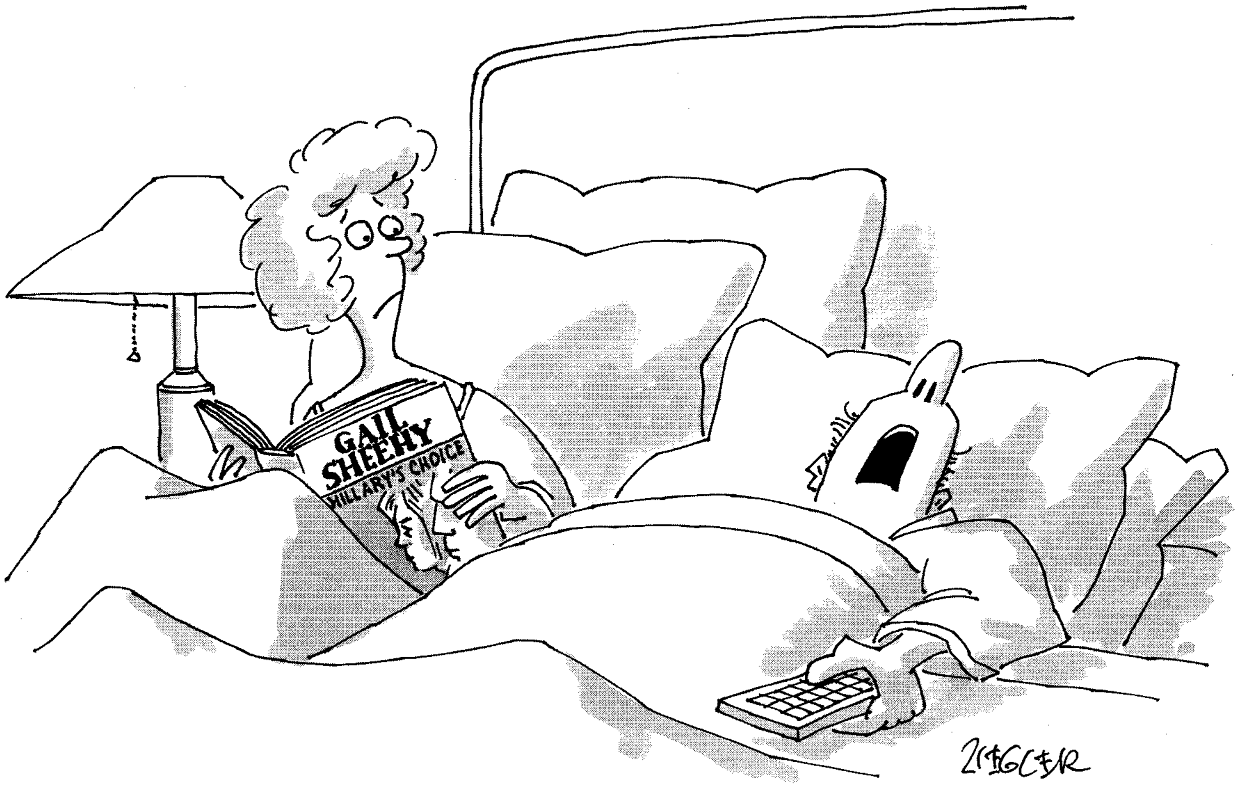
TEAKETTLES were a topic of discussion at a dinner held the other night in SoHo on behalf of Alessi, the seventy-eight-year-old Italian design firm. Alberto Alessi, one of three brothers who manage the company, sat at the head of the table, and the architect Michael Graves sat, rather uncomfortably, to his left. There has been some tension between the two men for the better part of a year, ever since Graves designed a teakettle, costing thirty-four ninety-five, for the Target discount chain that borrows heavily from the iconic "singing-bird" teakettle he designed for Alessi in 1985, which retails for a hundred and fifteen dollars. (The Alessi design is notable for the red plastic bird whistle that protrudes from its spout; the Target kettle features a more stylized bird whistle, in blue.) Alessi had made his displeasure over the similarity known, telling the Washington *Post* that Graves had violated a gentleman's agreement not to "design the same typology for another company."

This disagreement was the subtext of an after-dinner panel discussion on "The Destiny of Design," which included Milton Glaser, the legendary graphic designer, and a young up-and-comer named Karim Rashid. (The moderator, Mayer Rus, told the dinner guests that Rashid's work could be seen in Bed, Bath & Beyond, and that he had recently done manhole covers for Con Edison, "which are very trippy and 'Matrix.' ") The big question of the evening was: Do deals like Graves's arrangement with Target constitute a heroic bringing of good taste to the masses or do they represent an aesthetic selling out? With élite designers such as Frank Gehry, Philippe Starck, and Jasper Morrison also doing kitchen gadgets and utensils, low-end mass-market deals are the new obsession in the high-end design world.

Signor Alessi, the witty grandson of the company's founder, opened the discussion by announcing that he had come to respect the mass market. "Our goal as a design company is to be super and popular," he said. "I know very well how to be super, and not popular." He recalled the days, not so long ago, when, if a product was selling well, he would think that "it is not a good design, because . . . in the end, the mass market has no taste." But he also emphasized that the mass market still needed to be "educated"—that mass manufacturing as it now exists will never produce truly innovative design, because the decision-makers are too concerned with playing it safe. The market turns designers into mere "stylists," he told me later, and they just execute slight variations on what the market wants.

Milton Glaser moved the discussion from the abstract to the particular. "Is there a difference between Michael Graves and Martha Stewart?" he asked.

"She can cook," Graves said, which got a laugh, even from Alessi. (After the



dinner, Alessi told me that he still considered Graves a friend, even though he didn't like the Target teakettle. "It's too popular," he said. "It's not super enough. Now I want Michael to be SuperGraves for me again.")

Chee Pearlman, the editor of the magazine *ID*, raised her hand and suggested that it was the Michael Graves brand, rather than the design, that people in Target were buying—just as consumers buy Martha Stewart or Calvin Klein or Ralph Lauren home accessories, even though those people didn't actually design the products all by themselves.

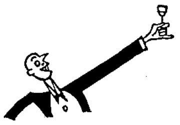
But Karim Rashid, in talking about a secret project that he is designing for Prada right now, ended the evening on an optimistic note. He argued that good design is a way *out* of the tyranny of the brand, because once people are educated enough about design they will choose the best-designed object, not the most desirable brand. "We now have so much more information that you don't have to hang on to the brand. You can move through the brand and feel comfortable with it," he said vaguely.

As the guests dispersed onto lower Broadway, some of them walked past a branch of the Lechters Housewares chain. Inside was a knockoff of Michael Graves's Target knockoff of his Alessi teakettle, this one with a yellow bird whistle. It was selling for thirty dollars.

—JOHN SEABROOK

HOOPLA DEPT.

Clash of the champagne titans?



ONE morning last August, a man in business attire, carrying a revolver, entered the warehouse of Wally's, a liquor store in West Los Angeles, tied up a clerk with stereo wire, and, with the help of accomplices, walked out with a thousand six hundred and ninety-five bottles of champagne, including sixty-seven cases of Dom Pérignon and three Methuselahs of a special-edition Roederer Cristal Brut.

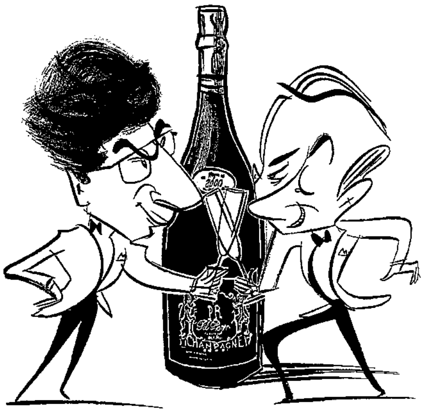
Despite such indications of a pre-millennial champagne panic, Christian Pol-Roger, a French *grande marque* champagne-maker, was feeling no anxiety whatsoever the other day as he poured his family's Cuvée Sir Winston Churchill 1988 into clear plastic champagne flutes for a small crowd of businessmen and well-dressed gray-haired couples at Morrell & Company, a Rockefeller Center wineshop. "We've taken appropriate measures," M. Pol-Roger, a courtly man in a dark bespoke suit and an ice-blue tie, said. M. Pol-Roger grew up with champagne: at his baptism, the priest, after crossing the infant's forehead with holy water, put two beads of champagne on his lips. To the assembled guests at Morrell, M. Pol-Roger, whose English sounds like a cross between Oxbridge and Pepe Le Pew, declared, "Happiness is my beeziness, so is craziness, so is fizziness."

For the last few years, in anticipation of this New Year's Eve, he's been stockpiling champagne in his *caves,* deep in the Vallée d' Épernay. He explained that his vineyard has devised champagne quotas for certain countries. (Luxembourg, he says, is allotted the most bottles per capita.) He doesn't think the world will run out of champagne or, for that matter, come to an end. "When I'm living, I'm not thinking about when I'm going to die," he said. He's looking forward to a quiet New Year's Eve at his château, drinking backward through some of his family's greatest bottles, among them "the 1990, the '66, and the '47—the last vintage Sir Winston drank," he said.

Halfway through M. Pol-Roger's tasting, Rémi Krug, whose great-great-grandfather Johann-Joseph founded Champagne Krug, in 1843, walked in—a surprise visit. There was a brief moment of awkwardness, as if two gunfighters had somehow got stuck in one small Wild West saloon. But M. Krug quickly dismissed the notion that the two *grande marque* champagne-makers were rivals. "You don't compare Beethoven and Mozart," he said solemnly.

M. Krug, who looks like an aging George Stephanopoulos and was wearing a long red scarf around his neck, likes his job. "When you go around and say that you're Krug, people smile at you—it's like you're an opera singer," he said. Being an ambassador of champagne can be demanding, though. People expect M. Krug to maintain a bright demeanor at all times. He said that he cannot look too stressed, or he'll disappoint his fans. "It's like Sean Connery when he plays James Bond," he explained.

Caroline Krug, Rémi's daughter, who lives in New York and works for the family firm, isn't very effusive about champagne—an unusual trait for a Champenoise. Unlike her father, she doesn't talk as if it belonged in the pantheon of high culture, right up there with, say, Proust. "We're just making grape juice with bubbles," Mlle. Krug said.



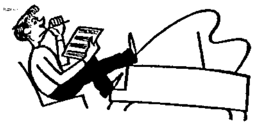
Rémi Krug and Christian Pol-Roger

As Vivaldi played in the background, M. Pol-Roger held up a magnum bottle with a low-slung label made especially for the millennium. He said it was like "a lovely, beautiful French girl, who, when you go out to dinner with her, she shows her shoulders." He then told the customers about an American wine aficionado who once counted forty-four million bubbles in a bottle of champagne. Shaking his head, he said, "Only an American would make that kind of calculation."

—FIELD MALONEY

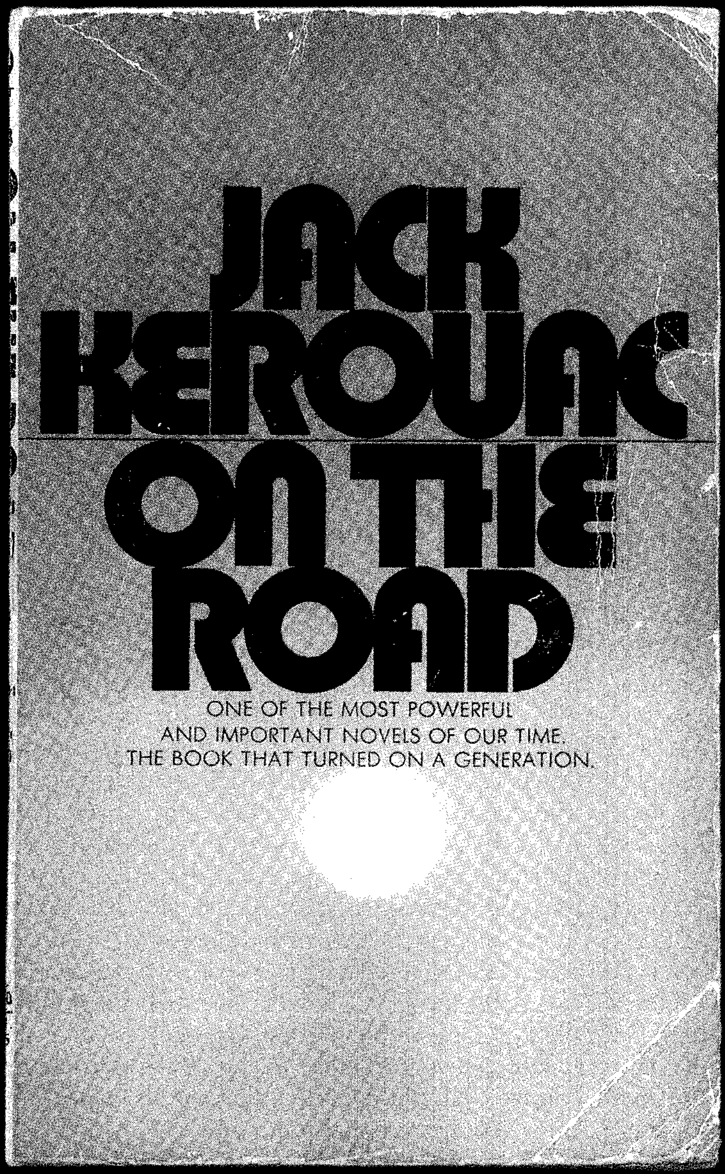
THE MUSICAL LIFE

A moonlighting lyricist's day is made.



HERE is a man privately happy in public, a large man, big-boned and a little portly, with sharp features—a chin and a nose that might belong to an Old World banker or a railroad chairman, a tycoon: a forceful figure among a crowd in a

June 22, 1972. Girlfriend forgets in bus somewhere near Kathmandu.



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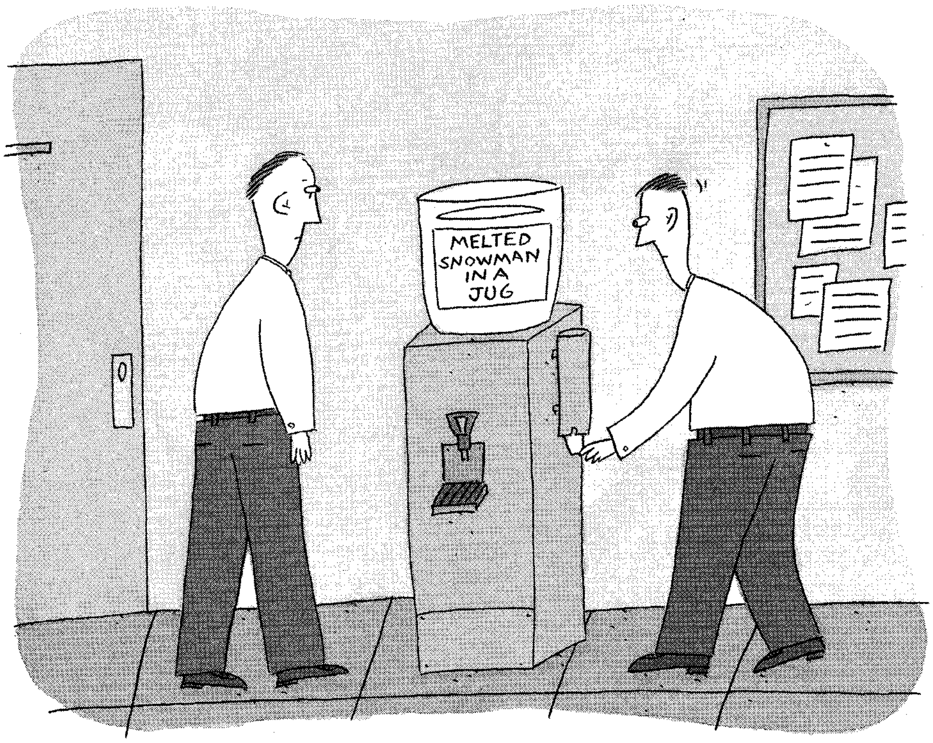
MELTED SNOWMAN IN A JUG

SOMETHING NEW FOR THE HOLIDAYS

• •

shadowy, high-ceilinged ballroom on a recent Saturday night listening to a rock-and-roll band called Ratdog, led by Bob Weir, the surviving guitarist of the Grateful Dead. The man is Gerrit Graham, the actor who plays Roger Bender, an insurance executive, on the CBS series "Now and Again," which is filmed in New York. Graham is close to elated because Weir is singing a song that the two wrote together and that Graham has never heard the band perform.

Graham and Weir have been friends for twenty-five years. Early in the eighties, they wrote a song called "Victim or the Crime," which is based on a passage from a piece by Béla Bartók. "I didn't really pirate it," Weir says. "I just paraphrased it." The Grateful Dead recorded "Victim or the Crime" in 1989, on "Built to Last," and played it with some regularity. Meanwhile, Graham wrote down ideas as they occurred to him, waiting for the Grateful Dead to make another album. "Of course, there never was a new record," Graham says, "so I have for a decade now had a little stockpile of lyrics."

Graham and Weir have written several songs for Ratdog. The one Graham likes best is called "Two Djinn," and is about spirits who work spells on the narrator. Weir assigns a song a position in a rotation of Ratdog's material and will not perform one out of its order, don't even ask. He keeps track of how often a song is played on a computer. Singing a song too often bores him. Also, it is a peculiar quality of the Grateful Dead's audience, which Ratdog has inherited a part of, that they are not content to hear the band once or twice but often follow it from one city to another. Weir prefers that they not hear a song in New York that they heard the night before in, say, Baltimore. All of this means that, until he arrived at the ballroom and saw the song list, Graham had no idea that "Two Djinn" was in the rotation for that evening.

When the band started playing the song before "Two Djinn," Graham left the side of the stage and made his way through the crowd to a roped-off area in the middle of the ballroom, where the sound technicians were working. From there, he could listen through headphones and hear "Two Djinn" the way it sounded to the musicians onstage. The song begins with what Weir describes as "an Iberian figure." Graham closed his eyes and leaned forward, as if straining to hear a conversation in a room where a lot of people are talking. He was listening for any awkward rhythms that might require a fix.

His lips moved occasionally with the words, and he began to sway a little and to lean suddenly forward or backward. He looked like a bear weaving on its hind legs. His head bobbed. He smiled. From time to time, he took out a pen and wrote notes to deliver in the dressing room to Weir. When the song ended, he applauded wildly. He took off the headphones and looked around, slightly self-consciously, a little sheepishly, secretly happy, and then he cleared his throat and lit a cigarette and returned to life as a private citizen.

—ALEC WILKINSON

POSTSCRIPT

NICCOLÒ TUCCI, who died the other day, at the age of ninety-one, liked to pretend that he was a flâneur, and he looked the part. He was handsome in an almost exotic way, and on his strolls he wore bespoke suits and floppy, Byronic bow ties. But in fact Tucci was rarely idle: he was always writing something, most often—in his novels and in his stories, many of which were published in *The New Yorker*—about the improbable circumstances of his own life and about the past he had chosen to abandon.

Tucci grew up in Italy, the son of an autocratic Italian physician and a high-strung Russian heiress; his own nature showed traces of both. After a flirtation with Fascism, he became a passionate and lifelong liberal, and in 1938 he moved permanently to this country. He never fully understood America—or he chose not to—which made him love it all the more. While living here, Tucci became a prize-winning author in Italian, but then determined to write in English; the transformation was so successful that eventually he was unable to translate himself, in either direction. His new voice, which he discovered almost immediately, was clear and idiomatic, yet, like Tucci himself, it had an unmistakable elegance and refinement. It was perfect English but with a flash of glamour. —CHARLES MCGRATH

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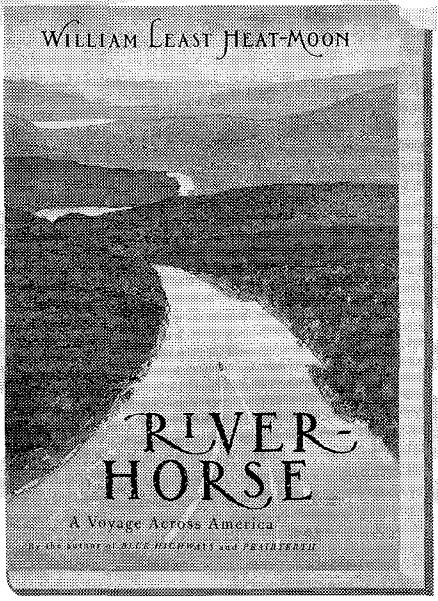
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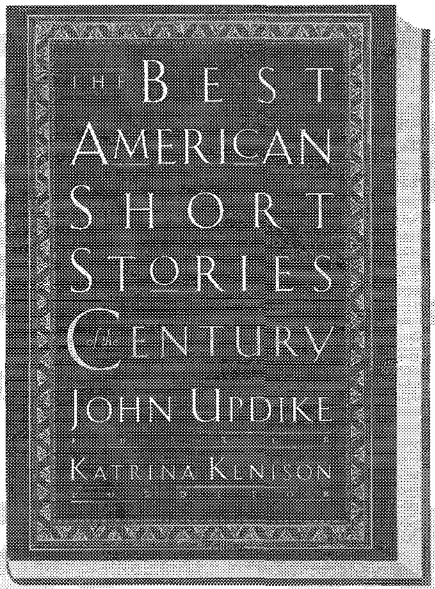
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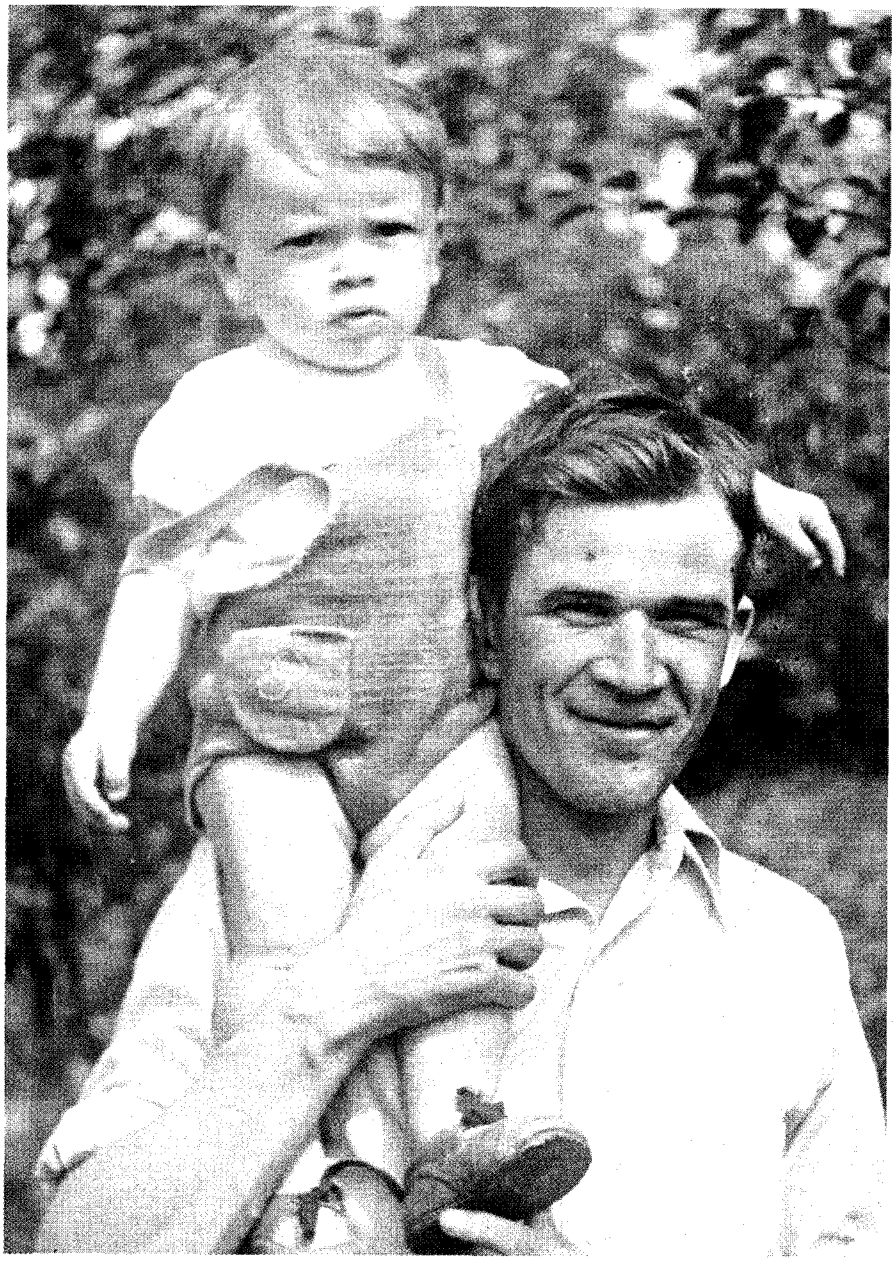
PERSONAL HISTORY

A MURDER IN MOSCOW

A Cold War family story.

BY VICTOR EROFEYEV



Victor Erofeyev and his father, circa 1950. "We started quarrelling under the baobab trees of Africa and continued in Europe."

COURTESY THE EROFEYEV FAMILY

TWENTY years ago, I killed my father. He is still alive, it's true, and he even plays tennis on his days off, but that is only incidental. The murder I committed was political, not physical, and under Soviet law the death was real. In 1979, my father was at the peak of his career. He was a Soviet Ambassador in Vienna and he expected to be made Deputy Foreign Minister. By 1980, he had lost his job in a major scandal and been recalled to Moscow.

My father was one of the most brilliant Soviet diplomats of his time. He had a quick mind and an incredible capacity for work; he had charm, good looks, modesty, and playfulness. He was a decent man, able to behave naturally and independently in the face of authority, even in the Stalin era. Or so I was told by Maya Konev, the daughter of the famous Marshal Konev, who knew my father well in the early fifties. (A photograph of him and Maya around that time at some Black Sea resort, leaning against a ZIS convertible and cradling tennis racquets in their sunburned arms, represents, for me, the very essence of Stalinist *douceur de vivre.*)

I heard my father praised by such diverse admirers as Rostropovich and Yevtushenko, and I couldn't help but be proud of him. He didn't send expensive presents "upstairs." He didn't pay court to his bosses' wives. He was disgusted by "diplomatic speculations"—the practice, widespread among diplomats, of purchasing abroad the prized Western goods that hadn't yet reached the wretched Soviet markets and reselling them for personal gain through Moscow's consignment stores. My father was a Communist by conviction, a Stalinist highflier who had served for many years in the Kremlin as Molotov's political aide, a man who had played a direct part in developing the Russian approach to the Cold War. He sincerely believed in the advantages of the Soviet system over capitalism. He had dreams of world revolution.

MY father came into contact with the enemy for the first time in the mid-fifties, when I was nine. He was posted to the Soviet Embassy in Paris as a cultural (and, later, political) adviser, and we moved from Moscow to France. He immediately entered into such active conflict with the West that French counter-intelligence labelled him a spy, and he aroused the indignation of many Frenchmen by arranging for Yves Montand to appear in Moscow after the events in Hungary in 1956. But he also deftly made friends with the right people. He knew Picasso, for instance, and visited him on the Côte d'Azur. Yet he took more pride in having saved from destruction an unknown French sculptor's granite bust of Lenin. (That particular incarnation of the leader of the Revolution gathered dust for many years in the Embassy's conference room.)

For my father, the most dangerous enemies were the Americans. Once, on a pleasure boat on the Seine, we sat next to some boisterous young men in bright-colored shirts who were talking loudly in English. "Watch out!" my father warned sternly. "They're American soldiers in disguise."

This is not to say that he didn't appreciate the pleasures of Parisian life—the restaurants, the Gitanes, the music halls, the sports clubs. He loved life too much not to, and he had an innate sensitivity, which at times clashed with his ideology. In any case, there was no totalitarian regime in my family. And that, in the end, was what ruined my father. Of course, he didn't bring me up to be a dissident—something beyond even his nightmares—but he showed me the world, and that was enough.

Returning from Paris to Moscow at twelve, I was appalled by the vacuousness and destructiveness of my schoolmates. I did not convert to Soviet ways, and my home life came to seem more and more schizophrenic. I took advantage of all the privileges of my father's position: I wore expensive French sweaters and suède jackets and looked like a Western playboy. But I also used my Soviet diplomatic passport to smuggle into the country the forbidden books of Nabokov, Orwell, and Solzhenitsyn.

My father and I were both idealists. We stood up for our opinions in the same way, and that is what drove us apart. He truly believed that the U.S.S.R. had more freedom than the West, and that its standard of living was no worse than Europe's. Though he acknowledged certain isolated deficiencies in the motherland, he would not allow me to generalize from them, still less lay a finger on his idol, Lenin. This attitude enraged me. We certainly loved each other as people, but over the years our conflict escalated into an undeclared war, and we didn't know what to do about it. Our arguments were infrequent but stormy. They knew no boundaries, scattered, as they were, over the map of his postings. We started quarrelling under the baobab trees of Africa, where he was Ambassador to Senegal and Gambia, and we continued in Europe. Once, when he was a vice-president of UNESCO and lived in a bourgeois apartment near the Eiffel Tower, and I was a longhaired student at Moscow State University, we argued all the way from Paris to Amsterdam, driving in his luxurious Citroën on the fabled European autoroutes with their yellow lights.

We became increasingly exasperated with each other; we could no longer look each other in the eye. I knew the truth behind the fiction of his success in the West: he turned over his salary to the Soviet Embassy, and the Soviets in return paid for his apartment and his car and gave him spending money that amounted to less than his French typist's salary. And I felt that he was divorced from Soviet reality after his years of living abroad. He once happened to take a trolleybus with me in Moscow and didn't know the fare or how to pay it. For my part, I was so disgusted by Communism that I was ready to welcome American intervention in Vietnam and even gave a sympathetic reception to Pinochet's military coup. That year, for the first and only time, my parents refused to celebrate my birthday.

If I lent support to Freud's theory of father-son relations, I did so unintentionally. I had no desire to argue with my father. Today, when I see how much pleasure it gives my son to beat me at Ping-Pong, I remember my own strange obsession with sparing my father's feelings. When we played chess, I was constantly afraid of beating him—although he played a master's game and I didn't know what I was doing. Yet, at the same time, my murder was unintentional only in the sense that it was defined by thoughtlessness, self-indulgence, and a careless distaste for the rules of the country in which I lived. In other words, it was almost entirely predestined.

LITERATURE is to blame, of course. My father read only the newspapers and the so-called "white" Tass—news digests produced for a restricted circulation. I never saw him with a novel in his hands, let alone a volume of poetry. My mother, on the other hand, who translated Theodore Dreiser into Russian, taught me a passion for reading with the books of Jules Verne and Jack London. I became a writer almost without noticing it. Living far removed from any literary circles, for a long time I considered the swarm of stories in my head a normal product of imagination. I understood what I had become only when I reached the point of no return, and

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when my parents were already regarding me with increasing suspicion.

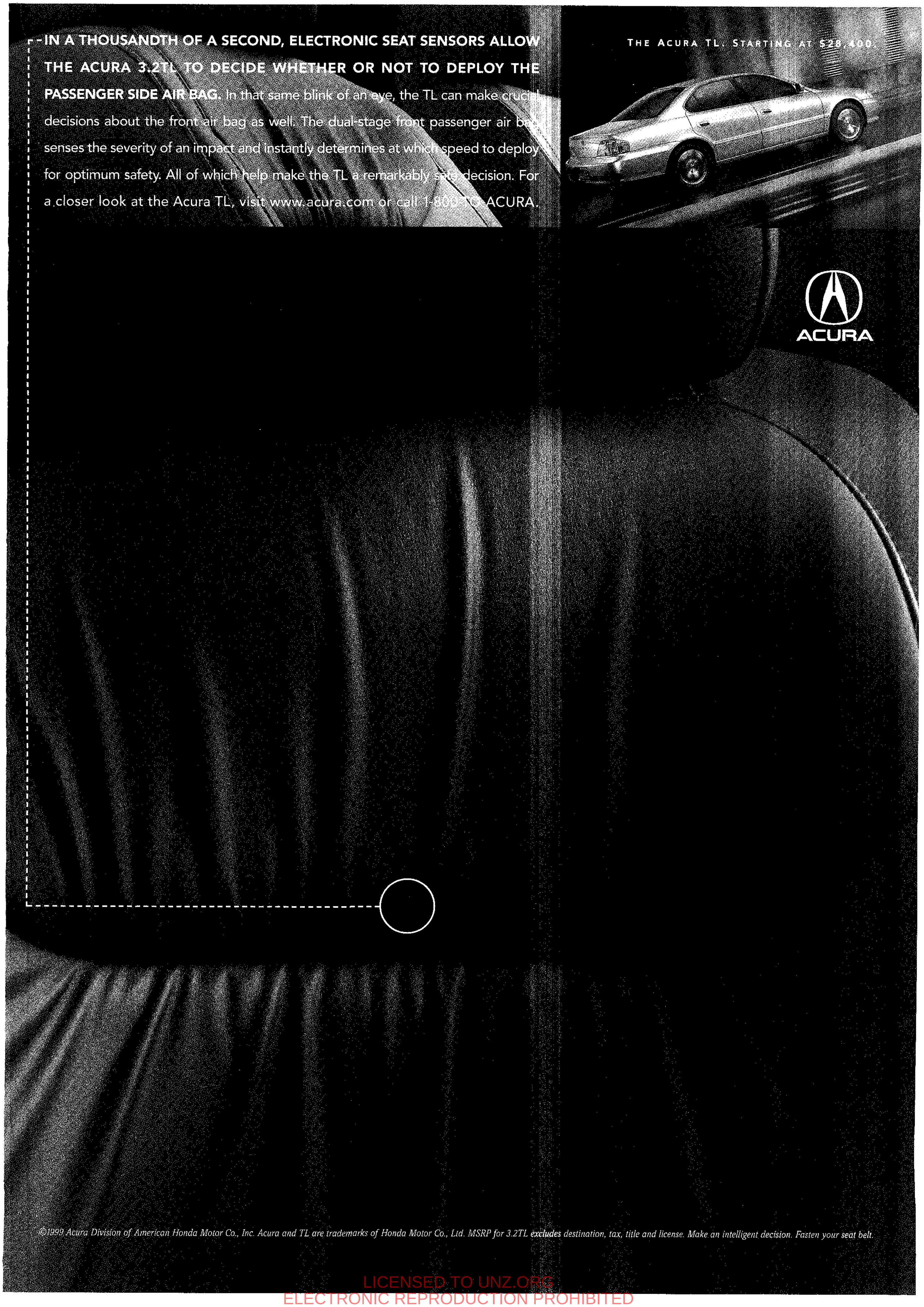
My first stories were not exactly seditious, not works of open dissidence, but they were definitely indecent, intended, as they were, to dismantle the foundations of life as I knew it. One minute I was filled with self-doubt, the next I saw myself as a young Dostoyevsky. Like every writer, I wanted to be published, but my country was manifestly not prepared to help me. I did, however, begin to publish literary essays, and they had a certain success. When I was made a member of the official Writers' Union, the elderly secretary of the criticism section was moved by my youth and embraced me, saying, "This is something you'll have forever." She meant the social status: the pass to the Oak Room, the club restaurant, famous for its celebrity clientele, for its fish hors d'œuvres and its steak à la Suvorov; the special medical clinic; the special holiday provisions with restricted caviar; the lecture tours around the country, and even abroad. If a member of the Writers' Union was stopped for speeding, he was let off without a fine. That was the writer's prestige. The authorities intended these privileges to buy writers' loyalty, but the liberals in the union only pretended to sell themselves, and then used their status in the Oak Room to promote covert opposition to the regime.

That secretary put a curse on me. I was expelled from the Writers' Union after seven months and thirteen days, possibly setting the record for the shortest membership since the union was established, in 1934. Why? Because in December of 1977, at the age of thirty, I set out to construct a literary hydrogen bomb.

My wife and I were renting a tiny apartment in Moscow opposite the Vagankovo Cemetery, and every day tuneless funeral music drifted in through our windows. There was a coffin workshop next to our house, and the newly painted coffin lids were often brought out to dry on the street, where our one-and-a-half-year-old son, Oleg, would grab them from his stroller and knock them over, much to the annoyance of the carpenters. What was going on outside my door only reinforced my line of thought: I wanted to bury Soviet literature as it existed then.

I had in mind the example set by Moscow's avant-garde artists. In 1974, their famous open-air exhibition had been banned and bulldozed. But since then, thanks to the pressure of international public opinion, they had won themselves an enviable touch of independence. Socialist Realism had taken a step backward. No such change had occurred in literature. The only liberal journal in the country, *Novy Mir*, had been crushed in the early seventies, and if you used the word "black" more than once in a poem you could be accused of negativity toward the state. I was still writing stories and, occasionally, I was able to read them in public. At an evening of "artistic débuts" at the Moscow Actors' House, I stammered out a story about graffiti in public toilets, which caused a sensation in the hall. "This is absolute filth!" an elderly actor shouted out in a well-modulated Arts Theatre voice. Yet, despite the country's obvious retreat into Stalinism, twice in the early seventies I managed to beat out censorship, publishing, in the journal *Voprosy Literatury*, the first substantial study in Russia of the Marquis de Sade, and then an essay on Lev Shestov, the émigré existentialist philosopher. These articles attracted clear disapproval from "the system."

My understanding of the system—unlike that of most of my fellow-writers, and of the intelligentsia as a whole—was not based on hearsay. I was a son of the system, an official member of Moscow's *jeunesse dorée*—the children of Politburo members, aides, ministers, ambassadors, and the military brass. As a rule, the members of my circle married among themselves, were patrons of hockey teams, went on African safaris, water skied on the Moskva River, had riotous picnics in government dachas, skimmed through porn magazines stolen from their fathers' desks, and screwed their mothers' hairdressers, whom necessity occasionally forced them to marry. The conspiratorial nicknames they invented for each other created an atmosphere of enigmatic exclusiveness that cloaked their arrogance, dissolution, and stupidity. I sought out their society only rarely, but with curiosity. I was close to the family of the head of the Party's Culture Department, Vasily Shauro, a Belorussian with a mournful face. It was he who had shut down *Novy Mir*, but he had also for long years been secretly in love with one of its most passionate readers—my mother. He even, I discovered later, kept some of her hairpins hidden away. Mama thought Shauro a "gray man," but she did let him into our home. Sitting on our sofa one evening,



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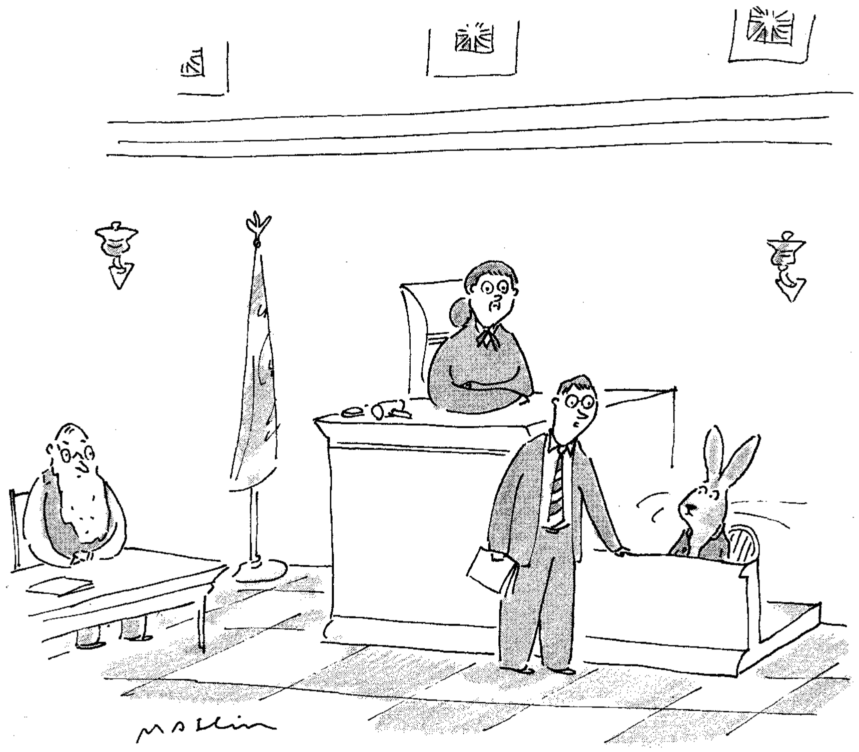
he flipped through a book and noticed a reproduction of a Salvador Dali painting of Gala nude. "How can a man paint his wife naked!" he said indignantly, slamming the volume shut.

Shauro dropped me a transparent hint that if I joined the Party he would take me into his department of cultural affairs, but it was clear that there was no way that he could help me to publish my stories. Instead, I continued to design my bomb: it would be an anthology of works banned by the Soviet censors. (When I say "censors" I am generalizing. The official censors only rarely had the chance to ban finished or published work. Instead, books were doctored or killed while still at the editorial stage. Editors knew that publishing seditious material could cost them their jobs, and they'd look at their writers with imploring eyes that said, "You don't want to take the bread out of my children's mouths, do you?" The Soviet system knew how to manage people.) I planned to unite, in one uncensored volume, both the liberal writers who were known to the whole country and adroitly used by the government for export—such as the poet Andrei Voznesensky—and the dissidents whom the system had removed from society. To demonstrate their shared protest, I imagined, would be to accuse the government of the deliberate destruction of contemporary culture and to nudge it toward concessions. As I wandered the untidy avenues of the Vagankovo Cemetery, I drew up a preliminary list of authors.

When we wrote, in the introduction to "Metropol" (as the anthology was eventually titled), that the book began with a toothache, it was more than a metaphor. One day, the writer Vassily Aksyonov and I both went to have our teeth checked at the Dental Center on Vuchetich Street. We were seated in chairs next to each other in a surreally huge hall that echoed with the grinding of teeth, and it was there that I led my famous friend into temptation. Next, I drew in as co-editors Andrei Bitov, the highbrow author of the novel "Pushkin House," and Yevgeny Popov, a promising Siberian writer of my own generation. We were soon joined by Fazil Iskander, an Abkhazian Faulkner. It was a strong team, and things began to move.

At our meetings, the well-heeled liberals smoked American cigarettes—difficult to come by in those days—while the impoverished dissidents puffed stinking Soviet *papirosy*. There were arguments. There were venomous quarrels between the women poets, Bella Akhmadulina, the idol of the young and a champion of public readings, and the much more private Inna Lisnyanskaya. Some withdrew their manuscripts. The novelist Yuri Trifonov decided that it would be better for him to fight censorship with his own books. The poet Bulat Okudzhava—who eventually decided not to participate—pointed out that he was the only Party member among us. Once, there was a ring at the door. It was Vladimir Vysotsky, the Soviet equivalent of Bob Dylan and the most popular of the "Metropol" authors. To the question "Who is it?" he replied, "Are you forging banknotes here?" We roared. We understood that the system would make us pay for what we were doing, but we didn't expect it to be brutal.



"If you would, Peter, please stand and point to the person you know as Mr. McGregor."

By late 1978, we had put together a hefty collection of works by twenty-three writers from four generations. "Metropol" was not a manifesto for any school of writing; we wanted aesthetic pluralism. Each writer, from the poet Semyon Lipkin, who had been discovered by Gorky, to Pyotr Kozhevnikov, a young prose writer from Leningrad, had his or her particular talents. And from their contributions emerged an honest portrait of Russia, with its religious quests, sexual disasters, drunken brawls, wild humor, national feuds, and intellectual potential. The portrait respected no taboos. It was an image of Russia straining toward self-knowledge.

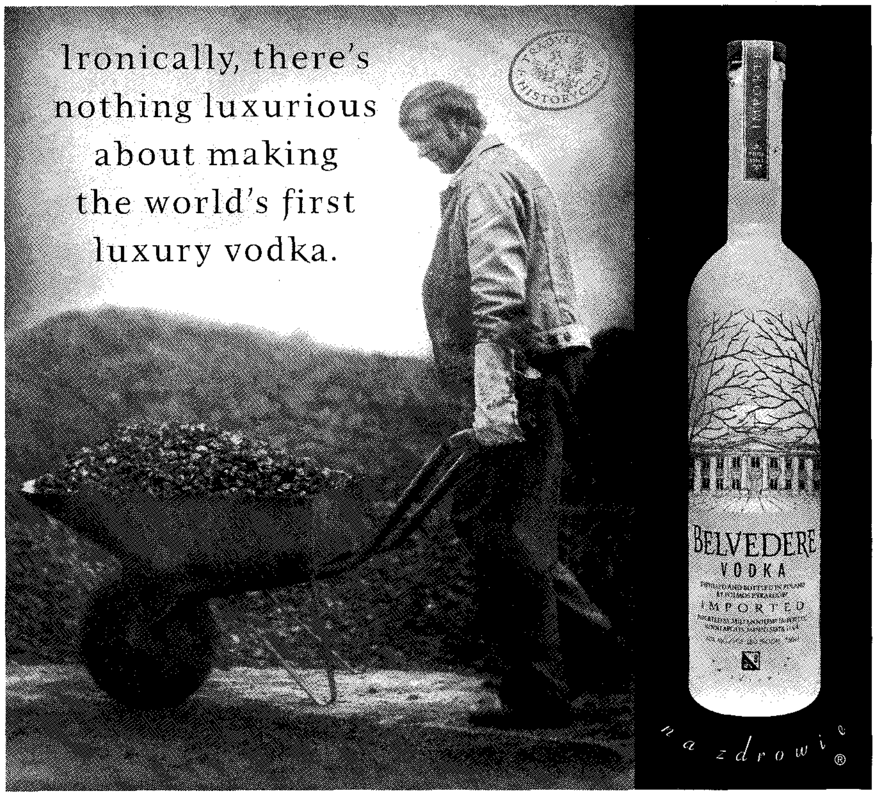
"Metropol" also had many anonymous helpers, who typed the texts and corrected them. They had to paste twelve thousand pages onto large sheets of paper to make up our symbolic first print run of twelve copies. Having thus produced the anthology in samizdat, we planned to submit it for official publication in the Soviet Union and abroad. We were later accused of having created "Metropol" exclusively for publication in the West, but this was not the case. We had made secret arrangements for French and American diplomats we knew to take copies of the anthology out of the country, but this was in order to preserve the book, not to get it published—and there we showed foresight. The "American" copy was given to the American Embassy's public-affairs officer, Ray Benson, on one of the coldest January days in the history of Russia, during a visit he made to Aksyonov's dacha. Ray quickly understood the book's significance. With a sly smile and while cheerfully wiping his nose, he put it under his arm and took it through the deep snow to his car. As I heard it, he made his report the following day in the American Embassy's "secret room," and the Ambassador, with a snap of two finers, signalled to him to hand over the book. A few days later, the anthology flew off to Washington in a diplomatic pouch.

In Moscow, our plan was to start with a "private viewing" of "Metropol" at the Rhythm Café, near Miusskaya Square, in late January, 1979. We invited three hundred people—Soviet and Western journalists, media directors, singers, cosmonauts, and foreign diplomats. In the Soviet era, this was a major *provokatsiya*, and it triggered a real-life thriller. The K.G.B. established a police operation to obstruct the event, and the day before it was supposed to be held agents surrounded the block, closed the café, and sealed its doors—the pretext being that inspectors from an epidemic-disease unit had just discovered cockroaches there. The five editors of the anthology were summoned to the Writers' Union for questioning, and the board called an emergency meeting to confront us. The whole thing had clearly been rehearsed. A few dozen loyal Soviet writers accused us of being the accomplices of foreign secret-service organizations. "I warn you," Feliks Kuznetsov, the chairman of the meeting, concluded, "if this anthology appears in the West, we won't accept any kind of recantation from you."

"Publish it here," we insisted.

Then there was unexpected news from America. Carl Proffer, who ran the Michigan-based Ardis Publishers, which put out uncensored Russian literature, had received the copy of the anthology that we had sent to Washington, and he had told the Voice of America that he intended to publish it. After that, we had no position of retreat. Ardis published the book in Russian, Norton published it in English, and Gallimard in French.

HOWEVER much I had despised the Soviet system before this, my struggle against it had been a purely theoretical one. Now I felt the Gulag's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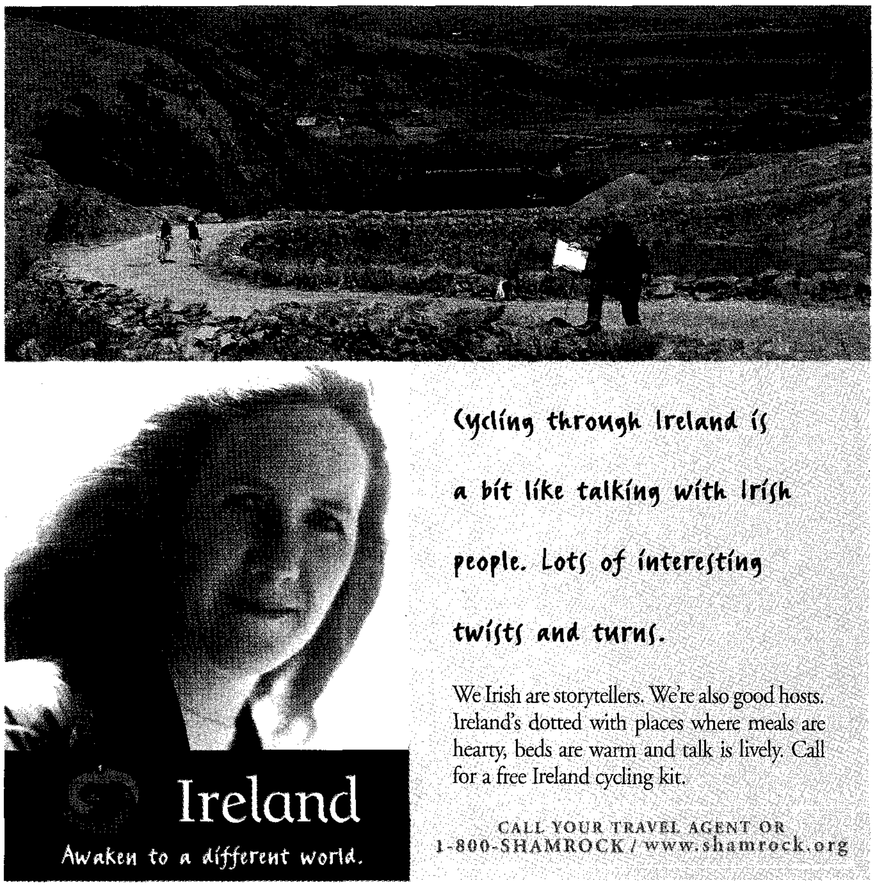
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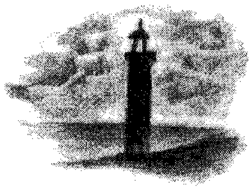
real chill. My phone conversations were bugged; my friends were summoned before the organs of state security and advised not to speak to me, under threat of "unpleasantness"; my car was broken into and searched; strange rumors were spread ("Aksyonov and Erofeyev are homosexuals. They founded 'Metropol' to test the strength of their male friendship").

"Victor Vladimirovich? Can we have a moment of your time?" My kidnapping by K.G.B. agents in broad daylight from the courtyard of the Institute of World Literature began with this seemingly banal question. It was like a movie. Two men in black suits took me to a special room on the top floor of the Belgrade Hotel. They spoke harshly and ordered me to produce all my manuscripts (or submit to a search of my house): they wanted "to get a better understanding" of my writing, they said. They threatened to prosecute me for the production of pornography.

I learned later that the K.G.B. had planned to exile me from the Soviet Union—to treat me as it had Solzhenitsyn. I was given the nickname Woland (after the Devil-like character in Bulgakov's "Master and Margarita"). Of course, my misfortunes were nothing in comparison with the hell that Anatoly Marchenko and Sakharov went through: I wasn't imprisoned or beaten in the camps, I wasn't force-fed while on a hunger strike. But in that year I understood the reality of the society in which I lived, the baseness and cowardice of some, the nobility of others.

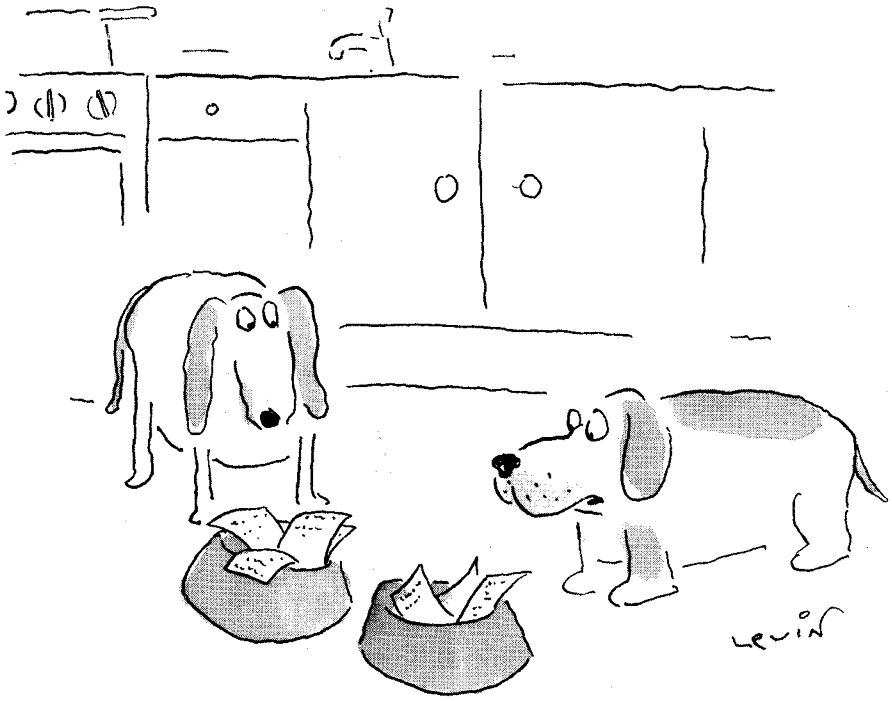
Punitive measures were implemented against almost all the "Metropol" authors. Books were banned (those already published were withdrawn from libraries), performances were cancelled, writers lost their jobs. "Metropol" 's chief victim, however, was my father. My mother told me that one evening when she was reading in bed, in Vienna, my father came into the room and handed her the latest edition of *Le Monde*. He said in a hoarse voice, "Read this. There's something here that will interest you." The paper's Moscow correspondent had reported on the "Metropol" scandal.



Had I dreamed up "Metropol" in order to teach my father a lesson? To show up his political delusions? Or to prove to him that I was a real writer and not just an amateur? Was I hurling my intellectual beliefs at my father like so many plates in a domestic argument? I can't really say from this distance, but I do know that my bomb exploded in his hands.

Two weeks before Ray Benson shipped off his copy of the anthology, my parents had been in Moscow for the Christmas holiday. We had seen in the New Year with oysters and French champagne. We hadn't argued about politics, and I had said nothing to them about my activities. I knew there was no chance that they would approve. And I naïvely expected to get away with what I was doing. Now that the K.G.B.'s secret documents and the memoirs of our opponents have been published, I know that I was not entirely misguided. There were those among them who wanted to allow the publication of "Metropol" in the U.S.S.R., and it is possible that we lacked just two or three big names for victory. In any case, I didn't want to involve my parents in the affair.

But the K.G.B. did. It determined, accurately, that my father was my weak spot, and it hit him. In late February, for the last time in my life I met my father as a Soviet V.I.P. A black limousine was sent by the Foreign Ministry to take me to Sheremetyevo International Airport. For the last time, the soldier who raised the barrier to let me through to the runway saluted me simply because I existed. I climbed the gangway of the white-and-blue Aeroflot TU-154, which had just arrived from Vienna, and walked into the first-class compartment, carrying an astrakhan hat for my father; the winter that year was savagely cold. He kissed me, smelling of brandy, and said as we left the plane, "This time I've come because of you." Then, without letting me speak, he uttered his first conspiratorial sentence directed not against the West but against his own kind: "Don't talk about this in the car—not in front of the driver." At my father's apartment, my parents' housekeeper, Klava, met us with loud wailing. She had believed a rumor that I had already been shot. My mother had stayed in Vienna to be treated for suspected breast cancer. Ahead of us all lay



"Oh no, not homework again."

• •

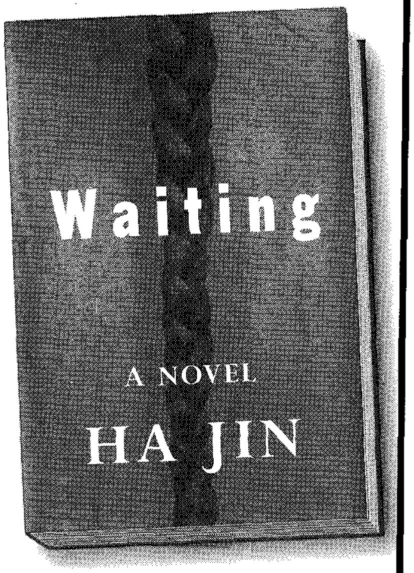
a black hole. I woke the next morning and saw on my temples my first gray hairs. I was thirty-two.

My father was immediately summoned to the Foreign Ministry, then to the K.G.B. and the Party Central Committee. The proposal put to him was this: If I were to write a letter of recantation and publish it in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, it would be possible to stop the publication of "Metropol" in the West. Stukalin, the chairman of the Foreign Ministry Party Committee, called my father into his office and announced, "In your position, I'd publicly disown a son like that." My father the diplomat was suddenly posted not to the European democracies but to his own son. He continued to receive an ambassador's salary in foreign currency as he "worked" with me at Foreign Minister Gromyko's behest. Gromyko had him informed of the price of failure: "If there is no letter, you will be recalled from your post in Vienna."

My father asked for help from his close friend Andrei Mikhailovich Aleksandrov, Brezhnev's foreign-affairs adviser, who was known in Washington and Moscow as the architect of détente—"the Soviet Kissinger." Behind his back I called him "the spermatozoan," because of his fondness for sex, his agility, and his leanness. Aleksandrov greeted his friend with a frown. "Did you really think that you'd spend all your life overseas?" he asked.

At the K.G.B., my father was told about my file. It was an impressive, three-hundred-page document: surveillance reports, records of phone conversations, a chart of my encounters, lists of my friends. But my father was particularly shaken by his conversation in the Central Committee. The Politburo, the country's highest governmental body, had discussed the "Metropol" affair and proposed a plan to crush it as an intellectual revolt. My father was called in by Mikhail Zimyanin, the Party's ideology secretary.

"You do understand, don't you, that 'Metropol' is the start of another Czechoslovakia?" Zimyanin said, using the familiar second-person pronoun to show that my father was being addressed not only by a high official but also by a friend, someone with whom he had played tennis. This friend, however, chose not to speak to him alone. My father had been tainted by my heresy and was no longer quite "one of us." Zimyanin made sure that the head of the Party's Culture Department was present at the conversation—Vasily Shauro, the man who had had feelings for my mother. My father had known



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him since they were students. At the start of the conversation, Zimyanin asked, "Do you know each other?" Shauro put out his hand and dryly said, "Shauro." Zimyanin read the more outrageous sections of the anthology out loud, singling mine out as the worst from a political point of view, then added, "Tell your son that if he doesn't write that letter there'll be nothing left of him." A threat like that, coming from an influential Party official, was chilling. They could do anything they liked with me—force me into the Army (a possibility Zimyanin also mentioned to my father) and deal with me behind barracks doors; put me in prison; provoke an "accident." My wife was afraid to leave our son in day care. We thought the K.G.B. might kidnap him and then resort to blackmail.

MY father had raised me not to be a coward, and now when I had to demonstrate my bravery he was a victim of it. I was torn. I could see his torment. When he came home after all those meetings, I almost didn't recognize him. And yet how could I betray my friends? I had instigated the entire project, had persuaded all the others. I could not just give in. A letter of recantation would defeat our purpose and disgrace me. I would never publish again.

I met my father nearly every evening in his apartment on Gorky Street. I'd take off my snow-spattered winter coat in the hall, hang it next to the African masks my father had collected in Senegal, and go straight to the kitchen. He had never learned how to cook, and without Mama and Klava he was quite helpless. I peeled potatoes, made salad, and cooked sausages, and we sat down to eat in the dining room. Afterward, we had tea with his favorite chocolate cookies. The objects in the room—armchairs, pictures, sideboard—looked quite different now than they had before the crisis, alienated and sickly. Even the bright chandelier couldn't give them light and life. Before we began to talk, my father would carry the telephone into another room and bury it under a pillow.

I wouldn't say that my father put pressure on me or tried to force me to write the letter. There was nothing like that. He thought of some compromises, but they were dropped because they suited nobody. The scandal grew. There was a lot of talk of "Metropol" on the Western radio; there were articles in the international press. The paper *Moskovsky Literator* carried rigorously selected and extremely hostile reviews of "Metropol" by Soviet writers. The anthology was officially categorized as "pornography of the spirit." In dismay, my father discovered some of his oldest friends among my persecutors.

I waited for the dénouement and, to be honest, I was scared. What if my father insisted that I write the letter—for his sake, for my mother's, for the salvation of our family? "Look at his shaking hands, look how he has aged," I said to myself. "What is more important to you—your father or all this hysteria?" He had been only good to me. And look what I had done to him. What parties he had given in his apartment! What meals had been served there! It might as well have been scorched earth now. No one called him anymore. Things were different for me. People did phone me, and many gave me support. When I met with the "Metropol" crowd, we had fun, some of us out of exuberance, some out of desperation. That year, I probably drank more champagne than at any other time in my life.

On the fortieth day of his visit to Moscow, my father asked me to dinner again. He was so pale I could hardly bear it. For a long time he was silent, chewing the sausages that had become a ritual for us. Finally he said, "There is already one corpse in this family—mine." I was silent, staring at him and trying to understand the drift of his thoughts. He mechanically folded and smoothed out his napkin. "If you write that letter," he said, "there will be two corpses in the family."

THERE comes a moment in every writer's life at which he must take an action whose consequences are unforeseeable. It's sink or swim, as the saying goes. If you swim, your life is transformed. If you sink—you're sunk. But if you don't take the action then you are no writer. That was the role that "Metropol" played in my life—the leap into the abyss. I was on the point of sinking when my father sacrificed himself to rescue me.

Within days Gromyko had ordered my father back to Vienna to say his goodbyes. There he was put under K.G.B. guard. The ambassadors of the Socialist countries, having heard of the scandal, didn't come to see him off, but his Western "enemies" gave him a friendly handshake and in low voices asked him to give me their regards. My father was boycotted, too, by the Soviet diplomatic housekeepers and maids who had been so servilely devoted to him not long before. He and my mother, still weak from her operation (which, thank God, had been successful), packed up their belongings themselves. They travelled to Moscow by train, and no official representative of the Foreign Ministry met them at the station.

I greeted my father with the news that Yevgeny Popov and I had just been expelled from the Writers' Union—which I had learned from a newspaper. My father nodded gloomily. "Should I perhaps give a press conference for foreign journalists?" he asked. In those days that would have been an act of suicidal dissidence, and I persuaded him not to.

Expelled writers didn't get published. I appreciated the gangster methods of the authorities: strike at the young ones, and scare and alienate everyone else. My union comrades from "Metropol"—Aksyonov, Bitov, Iskander, Lisnyanskaya, Lipkin—wrote a letter of protest, threatening to leave the union unless Popov and I were reinstated. Bella Akhmadulina wrote a similar letter. The Voice of America was quick to report this. We entered a new spiral of confrontation.

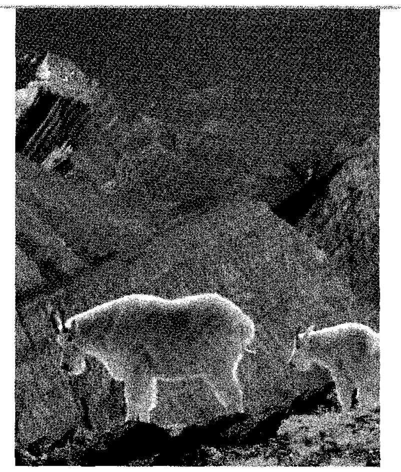
On August 12, 1979, the New York *Times* published a telegram of support for us, addressed to the Soviet Writers' Union by the American writers Kurt Vonnegut, William Styron, John Updike, Arthur Miller, and Edward Albee. It was made clear that these writers would refuse to be published in the U.S.S.R. unless we were reinstated. Discussions began, and continued for months. But it was the eve of the occupation of Afghanistan, and the government was no longer required to play at détente. In December, 1979, near the hundredth anniversary of Stalin's birth, the Soviet writers' bosses gave their dead leader a gift. They voted unanimously against our reinstatement. Bearing in mind that in the heat of the fight Andrei Voznesensky had disappeared on an expedition to the North Pole, Popov and I appealed to our colleagues to remain in the union rather than denude its liberal wing. Bitov, Iskander, and Akhmadulina were circumspect and did as we suggested. But Lipkin and Lisnyanskaya left and endured worthy poverty for years. Aksyonov also quit, but he soon left the country, was stripped of his Soviet citizenship, and happily accepted a position at an American university.

AND my father? My father, with no job, continued to keep his end up. Eventually, and not without embarrassment, he asked me a favor. He asked me to write a letter to Brezhnev, not recanting but explaining that my father was not responsible for my behavior. I wrote to the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. I said that I found it unbearable to see my father with no work, and that unless the situation changed I might kill myself.

There was no reply, and I didn't know what to do about my threat. How long should I wait? Finally, the system relieved me of my worries. At Brezhnev's behest, Gromyko arranged for my father to be taken onto the central staff of the Foreign Ministry. He was forced to sign a document stating that he—a diplomat!—wouldn't consort with foreigners, and he was given a unique, Kafkaesque form of labor. He arrived in his office every day around nine o'clock to find on his desk a copy of that day's *Pravda*. Unhurriedly he would chew the cud of Party news, and for that he got a decent salary. And so it was for years.

We continued to play our games of tennis on his days off. After all, we did now live in the same country. I was no longer afraid of beating him, and the sound of tennis balls echoing in the woods surrounding our dacha for some reason inspired a vague hope of change. I believed in it, despite the Soviet murk around me. From a "son of the system" I had metamorphosed into a free writer, and at night I wrote my first novel, "Russian Beauty." I couldn't have known that, ten years later, it would change my life, or that I would travel around the world with it. Nor could I have guessed that my father would renounce Communism, or that "Metropol" would be published in Moscow in 1990 and reissued in 1999. No one then knew that there would be perestroika. But those are other stories. Life was just beginning for me then—and I wanted to live it. ◆

(*Translated, from the Russian, by Peter Carson.*)



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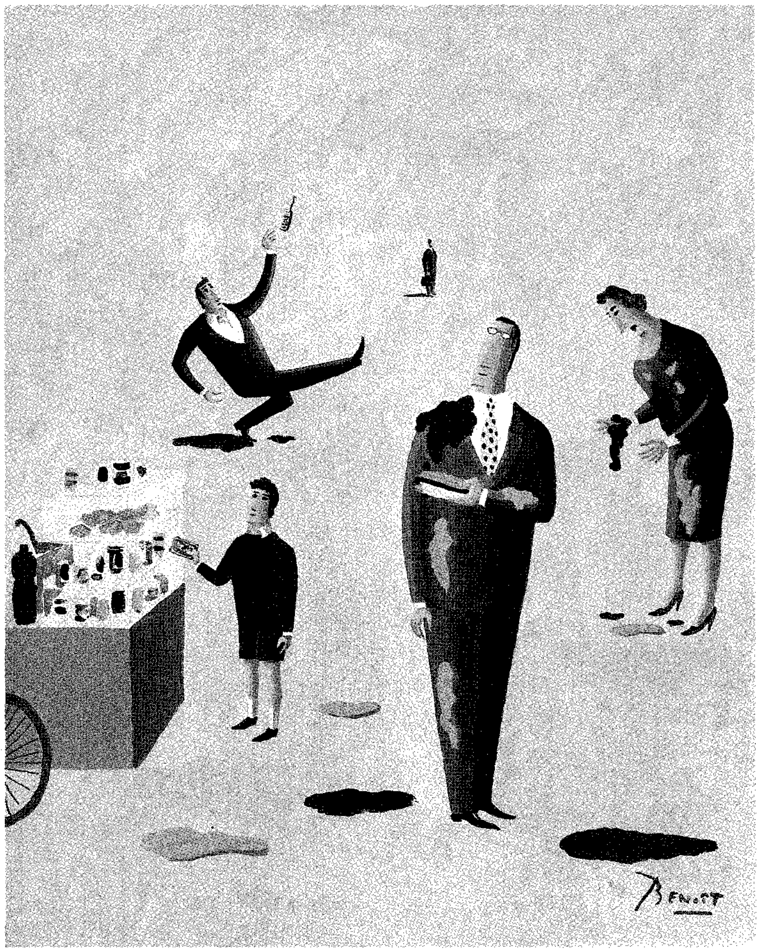
FICTION

STUART

BY ZADIE SMITH

"He lies like an eyewitness."—Russian saying.

THIS is the truth, whichever way you look at it. There are these two Greek guys. One is as huge as hell, with a melon for a face: round, yellowish, moist, pitted with black-headed acne—and yet genial, all the same. It isn't exactly the kind of face the Italians call simpatico, but it's without malice, the way a melon is without malice. It is generous just because it is neutral, and neutral is a sight to behold in certain quarters of the city where men wear their features aggressively, like national flags. Comparatively speaking, this guy looks fine—despite a thick neck with a circumference beyond your handspan, beaded with sweat like the legendary boxers'. It is a triumph on his part not to look cruel. But then maybe he's just not rich enough to do cruel. Maybe cruel takes more money. As it is, he wears an XXL blue shirt of that cheap material that isn't really silk but reflects light and looks fancy—though what the label doesn't tell you is that it tends to be less subtle about body excretions. You'd think it must be worth a little more of anybody's money to avoid the battalion of sweat advancing from the armpits, the front-line grime on collars, on cuffs. But no. He chooses this cheap pseudo silk. He doesn't do himself any favors, either, by tucking it all into some tight, heavy-looking jeans. It is clear that this guy has a hard time with clothes in general; buying them, getting into them, getting out of them. Nothing quite fits. Even his apron looks stretched to its limits, the strings burrowed deep in his flanks, subsumed by the overhang. The apron itself decorates his belly with a colored sketch of five famous Greek things: the Acropolis, a kabob, Socrates, Zeus, and, finally, defiantly, the Elgin marbles. And he's got gold on his fingers: a large chunk of a ring stamped with a centaur, and an Irish claddagh ring—two spindly feminine hands clasped around his own hairy middle digit. For somebody who is preparing food for the public, his nails leave a lot to be desired.



BENOÎT VAN INNIS

The other guy, his partner, is about a foot shorter but just as wide, and he's mean-looking, which can often be a mere accident of physiognomy but other times proves to be right on the money. He is dressed roughly the same, except his apron claims that "Greek Men Do It Better," and he is sufficiently bull-browed and rivet-jawed to pull that sort of thing off. The two of them work a hot-dog stall with no name that you'd notice. The griddle is split among regular hot dogs, large hot dogs, and hamburgers. The onions are fried in a two-inch groove that runs horizontal along the front. The big melon-faced guy flips the burgers or turns the hot dogs, fries and refries the onions. The mono-browed mean-looking short guy scrapes the hot fat from one end of the griddle to the other with an egg slice, puts the meat in its respective bun, and squeezes the sauce bottles. Whoever has a hand free deals with the money. Wipes one hand on the corner of his apron, deals with the money. Exchanges coins, folds notes, opens and closes the cashbox—all with one hand. You can't get rich with this kind of enterprise, but Friday nights and school holidays keep your head above water. Everything runs pretty smoothly. Organized. Efficient. That's the only way to make it in this country. And you don't need to tell these guys that. There is a short red plastic tub on each side of their stand. The one on the right—their right—is for rubbish; the one on the left for napkins.

At about two o'clock, three white boys come into view. Fourteen, maybe fifteen years old. The small one might be thirteen. It's hard to tell from this angle; none of them can call puberty an old friend, a force of good firmly on their side. They have baby-blond womanish sideburns on their faces; not even sideburns, wisps of hair made darker and more substantial by hair products and—who knows?—maybe toothpaste. They have man-sized hands sprouting from elongated, spindly limbs like the extremities of flamingos, and their feet are so huge they might be prehensile; these kids might have just swung into town. There's nothing in the backside of their immense, baggy jeans, no backside to speak

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Chicken Soup for the CRIMINALLY INSANE

• •

of, just air, and possibly this is an evolutionary development, for they are rarely to be found sitting down; they are always in a pack and on the move—they need backsides the way the rest of us need tails. Likelihood is they didn't pass an exam among them this summer, but their bodies are clever and have been adapting from the inside, silently, almost imperceptibly at first, confounding parents and politicians. These are not the bodies of boys a hundred years ago, or even thirty years ago. These boys are new. They wear a yellow shirt, a pink shirt, and a blue shirt, respectively, and this is how they will have to be identified, because their shoes (white trainers) and haircuts (short, greased, quiffed) are uniform; each has a can of beer lolling in his Mickey Mouse mitt, and two of them are the same coloring and height. They don't address each other by name. They know each other too well.

"Hot dog, mate," says the yellow shirt, and the smaller Greek takes one out and throws it on the griddle without a word. At some stands you're asked for the money first. Other stands want the money at the same time the hot dog's picked up. If they believe in building trust they might ask for the money after the hot dog is across the counter. These two particular Greeks seem to play it by ear, depending on how they feel about the customer. There is good feeling, for now. They don't mention money yet.

The pink shirt says, "Three hot dogs, mate. Three, yeah? Quick as you can, mate."

He looks over his shoulder. "Before they fucking catch up with us, eh?" he says to his friends, laughing. They all laugh.

"Nice day for it, eh?" says the yellow shirt, motioning to the sun, Mediterranean in September. The big Greek smiles and nods. "Indian summer," he replies. He tears open the plastic bag where the meat is kept. Two hot dogs sidle up to the first.

Then a group of little girls, none older than nine, comes round the corner, indeterminable in number because they move so quickly toward these older boys, pull at their legs, crowd round them, and begin twittering all at once.

Most of them are black, with long eyelashes and complicated hair. They all want hot dogs. They all want the older boys to buy them hot dogs.

"School holiday, eh?" says the bigger Greek, sympathizing. "You got to keep an eye on them?"

The pink shirt, eyelids not under his control, drunk in the afternoon, nods in the direction of the housing estate on the horizon, a long wide tetrahedron that declines in stages, balcony under balcony, in a slope like a giant staircase. This is where they come from.

"Mate, they just *follow* us," he says, grinning. "For fuck *sake*. I fuckin' *told* ya, didn't I?" he says irritably to a small white girl, a girl with similar watery green eyes, possibly his sister. "Take this lot with you and go and find something to do. No, I ain't buyin' you nuffink. Get out of it."

But they won't go and he gets into a debate with them, holding his head with one hand, his beer with the other. He's trying to explain. Meanwhile, his friends look sheepish, swig from their cans, kicking their feet against the curb.

"Fuckin' hell, man," says the yellow shirt. "I can't deal wiv this. We shouldn'ta come for hot dogs. Should've gone straight to the fucking pub, innit? They can't follow us in *there*. I can't take this, man. Just gonna...yeah?" He gestures round the next corner, away from the girls. "Yeah?"

The pink shirt is down at the girls' level, crouching, not really listening. And then there is the street noise that swallows certain words, stealing away dialogue, filing it between car exhausts and police sirens. So his friends slink off without him. Maybe for a smoke. Maybe for more beer. They move into the city, merge with it, casually, the way young men can—there is no suggestion that they won't come back or that they will or how long they might be. No one notices them leaving until they are gone. The big melon-faced guy is scrapping some onions up from the groove and turning the three hot dogs. His partner, head down, splits open three rolls and now proceeds to brown them. The pink shirt is busy forming a compromise out of some bubble gum he finds in his pocket. He bribes the girls with the pack and watches them scoot off.

"And don't come back," he shouts after them, but with a smile in his voice. The girls are so fast and loose-limbed they hit their behinds with the soles of their own shoes.

So it's only now that the pink shirt notices the absence of his friends as he straightens up, puts his tongue on the roof of his mouth, and extends his bottom lip, intending to form a name beginning with "T" (Tommy? Tony? Tim?); stops, sighs, says "Fuck it" under his breath. The beer has made his eyes slower than his brain, and they play catch-up in their sockets as he moves his head first right then left. He looks out helplessly now, down, along, toward the corner his friends might have turned. His jaw is slack; he repeats his request for hot dogs, speaking in the direction of no one and giving in to a slur. Then his grip slips; the beer can falls to the floor.

"You pick that up, please."

There is a voice speaking to him with slight aggression, and the boy brings his head round with some effort to attend to it.

"You pick it up, please."

The kid doesn't want any trouble. He picks it up willingly, spilling a little, but making no complaint.

"Sorry, man," he says, getting a firmer hold on it. "There you go, mate," he says and launches the can toward the red tub on his right.

The big Greek sighs in a deep, deliberate way, fishing the beer can out of his tub of napkins, and the kid takes in a sharp breath, wondering if this is the end of the good feeling. He can see that even the big Greek's casual grip bruises the can, giving it an adolescent overbite, stretching the lip over the rest of it. The big Greek looks at the kid as he does this. Then, to make his point, he waits a beat and throws the can along the street, aiming for a mouthy black bin, an obedient bulldog called to heel next to a traffic light. "Napkins," he says, pointing to the napkins. "Bin," he says, pointing to the bin. But, for some reason best explained by aerodynamics, it doesn't work out like that. The can's busted lip hits the rim of the bin, and the can spins off, retraces its flight. Four feet from the stall, it collides with a passerby—another young man, with a swaggering, wide-legged walk and a suit that he *needs* to make him better than this kid in the pink shirt—and

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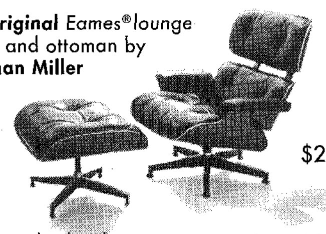

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the can weeps piss-colored beer all over his trousers, soaking the right pocket.

Immediately, the big Greek tries to offer hot dogs. It's the only currency he has. He gestures desperately to the three shimmying in their skins, popping in their own fat, those earmarked for the pink shirt, the blue shirt, and the yellow shirt, while his partner approaches the young man, apologetic, carrying napkins, as eager to dab the man as the man is to avoid him. He keeps repeating two sentences: *It's these kids, they don't respect nothing* and *Have what you like, free, on us.*

While, soaked and furious, the other guy plays his own scratched record: *If my phone's fucked, someone's fucking paying for it* and *I don't want your fucking hot dogs.*

Until it emerges that his phone is fine; he stalks off with it, phoning his secretary, saying, "Some cunt spilt beer all over my fucking . . .," turning the corner now, but still loud enough for the big Greek to hear how he is being described to somebody he will never meet. Maybe it is a woman. A white woman. Maybe she is beautiful, with long blond hair and teeth like in the ads. The big Greek, he's not cruel; he's not cruel like some guys in the city; but somebody's to blame for this latest humiliation, small but painful. Some blond woman he has never met will now never make love to him because he is just *some cunt*, selling hot dogs, spilling beer. She won't know that Greek Men Do It Better. She won't discover the truth: that while her ancestors were swinging through the trees his were writing great books and sculpting white bodies; bigger than men and smaller than the gods; halfway between here and heaven. The big Greek feels his face get hot. He feels sure he should have hurt that man for saying those things, but the opportunity has passed. In this city, you might miss your nemesis in a crowded shop in the morning and fight your friend in a park in the afternoon, never knowing your mistake. So he glares at the pink shirt. And the pink shirt prods his own chest, either side of the sternum, and then lowers his arms, his hands cupped as if holding two sandbags, a human scale, a defeated crucifix. The universal gesture for "Me?"

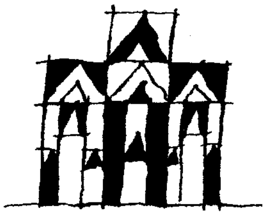
"Yes, you. What you think? I stand here all fucking day for my health? Who's going to take these? Where are the other two? Why you order if you not going to eat? You pay for three. Yes, you pay for three."

The kid remonstrates. And now the small mean-looking Greek steps into the arena.

"Yes, my friend, it's your fucking problem. It's not *our* fucking problem. Must be your fucking problem. Four-fifty now, please."

Once again, the pink shirt reaches for a word, the same old word. It is strange that even as the bodies evolve the language gets smaller and smaller—it is peculiar how few words you need to travel across town, get in a fight, ride the tube, buy a hot dog, fall in love. Here comes the same old word. Slowly, head back, teeth firmly planted in bottom lip, all facial muscles pulled tight: catapult face.

But something has snapped in the big genial Greek—this is the last day he can be spoken to like that, the last minute he can be genial in this city. It has finally broken him. From now on, when people ask him where he's from, he will have to think for a moment. Soon the answer *Greece* will feel as strange in his mouth as chalk. From now on, he's from *Here*, subject to all the daily cruelties of this place. And he's got the pink shirt by the collar now, before the kid has even opened his mouth. Next thing anybody knows, the kid's been hit, badly, across the nose, and it's bleeding and bent like in the movies. Peacekeepers and antagonizers appear in equal measure from nowhere, from invisible side streets, trying to put their hands on or between the action, and the big Greek's partner says, "Marios, Marios, *enough* now," trying to halt the taking off of the apron, because evidently Marios takes off his apron only when something serious occurs in his life. It is a signal of his intention to become more serious still. "Let the boy fight for himself," says Marios.



The pink shirt is on the ground, lamenting. He says, "He hit me! Fucker hit me for fucking *nothing!*" Doesn't look as if he'd ever been hit before. He can't get up because of the shock. He's crying and bleeding and snotting, and is choking on all three of these involuntary emissions. "These kids," says a spectator, a man leaning out of the mobile-phone shop next door. "All mouth and no trousers."

But here they come, the trousers, running balloon-legged as air rushes up the absence where a backside is meant to be; yellow shirt and blue shirt, at the scene, trying to process what eight or so eyewitnesses are shouting in unison, trying to listen to the testimony of their friend.

"He hit me!" explains the pink shirt again, incredulous. "I wasn't doing nuffink, he just hit me for no fucking reason!"

And it is this, in the end, that he can't understand; that someone should hit him for *no reason*, that things happen in the city for no reason, and blood can spring from nowhere. He's thinking, It's not *fair*. He's thinking about those guys in the papers—white shirt, green shirt, red shirt, pink shirt, orange shirt—who killed a black guy and got nothing, and here he is *minding his own business* with a nose pushed three centimetres to the left for his trouble.

"Fight!" shouts someone, describing what has just happened, inducing what is to come. On cue, the yellow shirt takes a wild swing at Marios, but Marios is without apron and Marios is too fast and fearless. His punch is a soaring sweeper with the ring hand and the centaur rides down the boy's cheek, slicing it open. The blood is a carmine red. Marios's ancestors were making wine that color, pouring it into goblets, comparing it to the sea, while everyone on this pavement was swinging from the trees.

"Come on then!" shouts Marios, beckoning the crowd with his fingertips, defying those who feel that hitting one child might be described as unfortunate but hitting two looks like malice. "Who wants some?"

No one—except maybe the blue shirt, who has resolved to be cunning, sneaking up behind the small mean Greek, and crushing his beer can on the back of his head. The small Greek flinches the way you flinch when someone plucks a hair from your head. And for a moment nothing happens. Then he turns. No one

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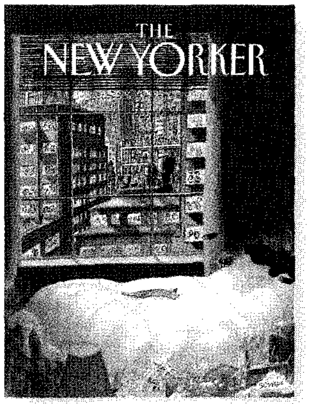

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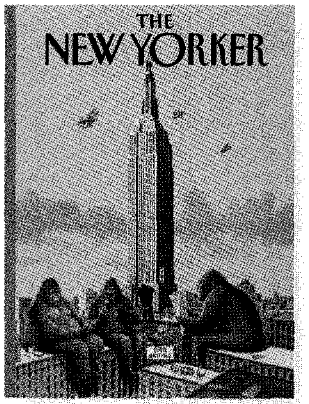

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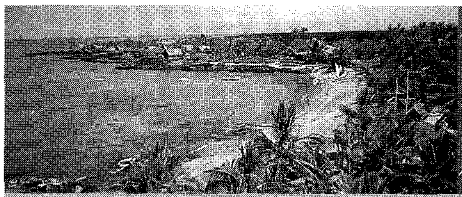

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can be in any doubt now that this particular mean-looking short guy is a book that the wise man judges by its cover. He draws back his football of a fist. Everybody starts to run.

The blue shirt is first, obviously, followed closely by the small mean Greek, followed by the assembled chorus, which contains Marios, maybe also the yellow shirt—things are moving too fast to be sure. This is a tableau doing the hundred metres. The blue shirt runs as if Tyson were on his tail. High-foots it. Works his arms and pulls his knees up and keeps his head low like Linford Christie—just looking for the free pavement. It comes down to a hunt now, and though the small Greek has his two fists, his simple and effective city weaponry, the boy is darting like an okapi; jumps bins and weaves between pushchairs and shoppers and old people, down the high street, searching for any way out.

"I'll kill you!" says the small mean Greek. No one is in any doubt of that. No one stops running.

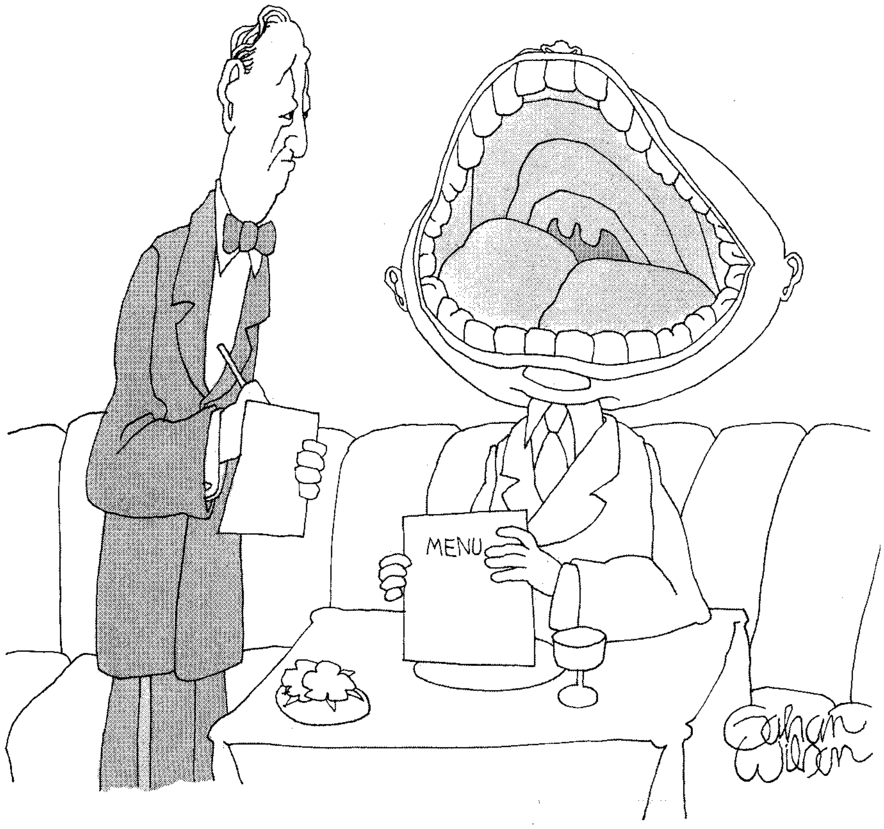
It's all a matter of being the first to see what's coming next. That's how you win in this country, any country. It's the blue shirt, the chasee, who is the first to understand that the hundred metres is going to turn into the four hundred metres, and he paces himself accordingly, while the small mean Greek, the chaser, struggles. And it is the blue shirt who first spots the final metamorphosis, from the four hundred metres to the hurdles, as they pass the crossroads and the second set of traffic lights and head directly for the three-foot iron railings that line the pavement outside McDonald's. It's just *elegant* the way he leaps them, barely breaking his stride, his legs in an "S" shape as he glides over, landing as firm as a Russian gymnast and turning the corner without slowing down. Leaps like that are what being fourteen is for. The small mean Greek is so transfixed by it that he, like everyone else in the street, ignores the street for a second, focussing only on this flying boy, who has been made supernatural for a moment by the extra six inches in the air that his fear and his youth have bestowed upon him.

The small mean Greek ignores the street like everyone else, thinking he will be safe like everyone else. But it is only he who is heading directly, unknowingly, for the tremendously fat man in the brown McDonald's uniform who is leaving work, pushing open the large glass doors, minding his own business with a Big Mac and large fries. An immense man. Three hundred pounds of a man. He barely walks, this man, but waddles; he needs to turn his feet out as much as possible just to stay upright. His long hair is in a ponytail, wet with sweat from root to tip. He's out of breath from the effort of crossing the road, and you get the feeling he's *always* out of breath. It's hard work being that weight in this city and keeping any dignity. You get stared at with pity and relief, because whatever the commuters have done today, no matter how shameful the act, it is put into perspective by the sight of you and others like you, fat and poor. Fat poor people are truly public television. And if this guy notices anything wrong as he bites into his burger it's just that he can't feel any eyes on him this afternoon. Something else must be happening on a different channel.

"Move!" shouts someone. But it's hard to save a man if you don't know his name. They're not close enough to see "Stuart***" on his nametag. Only three stars. Five stars are the most you can receive as a McDonald's employee. But Stuart*** is only an average McDonald's employee. Lord knows what he does wrong. Maybe his weight makes him unpleasant to the customers. Maybe he's slow with the coffee. Through the glass front of the restaurant, ten feet away, you can see that other servers are Somalian, or Indian, or Caribbean, and are in the five-star bracket. Maybe they give five stars only to their own. No doubt Stuart*** has suspected this.

Jesus!

That is the sound from the crowd as the two men collide and Stuart*** goes up in the air, his belly moving like a giant beanbag, his whole form rising a foot, two feet from the ground, at least. *Christ* is the word as he lands, badly, horribly, as only a fat man can land. For even once he's hit the ground it is not over, as the force of the impact travels in waves through the loose flesh. And then a collective gasp occurs, the kind people believe to be a convention of the movies until it happens to them. Many of the women scream.



"Something this big."

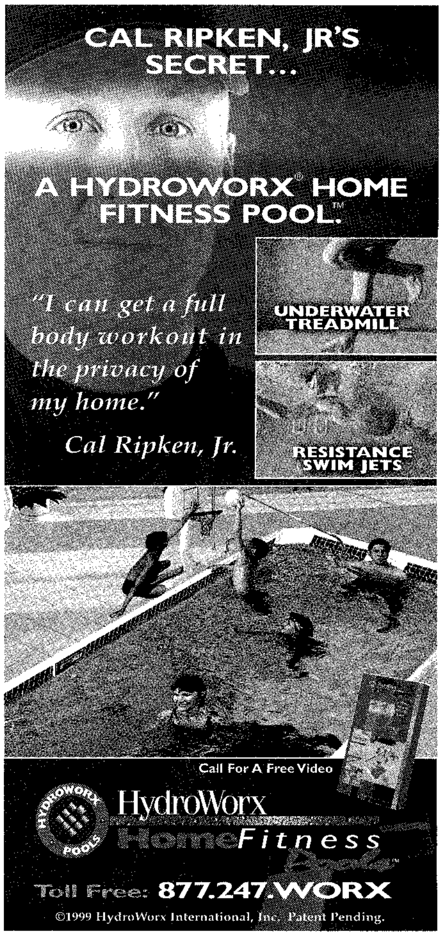
• •

The more responsible people, the people we would like to have running our hospitals and checking our gas heaters, look for the nearest phone and tentatively suggest first aid or that no one panic. The yellow shirt vomits where he stands. The small mean Greek kneels on the ground where he fell, looks to the heavens, and shouts something in his mother tongue.

"Oh God!" cries a woman, as if Stuart*** were her own child. "Oh God, oh God, oh God! I can't stand it!"

She means she can't stand the thought that blood can spring from nowhere, even when it isn't her own. But you've got to be tougher than this woman if you want to survive in this country, any country. "Somebody call an ambulance!" she says, though she knows in all probability that somebody already has.

This is the truth, whichever way you look at it: Stuart*** needs an ambulance right now. Stuart***'s stubby sausage of a right leg is bent backward at the knee. His foot is back-to-front. He is faced with his own heel like a puppet doing the cancan. His whole body reverberates with the pain. You can tell, because he's shaking like a Mexican jumping bean. He can't cry, because he hasn't even got that far. He hasn't got as far as *consequences*. He's still sitting in the *event*. Yet already he has passed into anecdote, and those who didn't see it are being told about it by those who did, putting more pounds on him than his frame can hold, placing him higher in the air than a man can go. People will go home this evening and phone their friends. People will elaborate over dinner. And it might serve to stave off an awkward silence between colleagues tomorrow morning as the train rumbles on from the end of the line to the middle of town. For a brief time, sitting in the street stopping the traffic, Stuart*** becomes the center of the city, the median coördinate, a dubious honor he never hoped for nor expected to receive. He is in enough pain for the entire city. Everybody watches him begin to hyperventilate and dig his fingers into his stomach, searching for where it hurts, for where the hurt begins. Someone should tell him he'll split his lip if he keeps biting down on it like that. Stuart***'s eyes are closed. He will be the last person to see what has happened to him. ♦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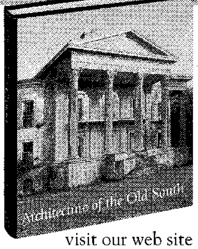
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AN AMERICAN ORIGINAL

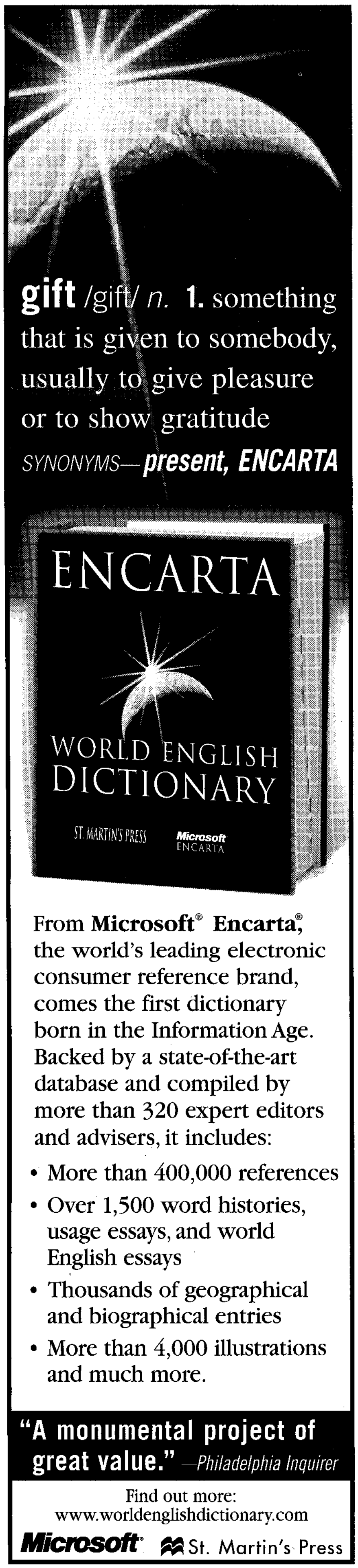
Learning from a literary master.

BY ALEC WILKINSON

When I was a child, William Maxwell and his wife, Emily, lived down the road from my parents, and Maxwell was my father's closest friend. My father was the art director of the magazine *Woman's Day*. Three days a week, Maxwell edited fiction at *The New Yorker*. My father drove to the train station in northern Westchester County in a Jeep he'd bought for twenty-five dollars from a dealer in Army surplus. On the mornings when Maxwell also took the train, my father stopped at the end of Maxwell's driveway and pressed on the horn. They were so comfortable with each other that if they spoke at all during the ride it was about the furnace not working properly, or the poison ivy taking over a stone wall, or how to keep a pipe from freezing, or whether a woman who lived up the road was as pretty as my father insisted she was. Their intimacy was of the kind that excludes other people; a man who sometimes rode with them once said dismissively, "They're like an old married couple." When my father's first wife sat up late sewing a ruffle around the edge of the bed my father was trying to sleep in, Maxwell used it in a story, and when my mother, standing in his flower garden, remarked, "Children and roses reflect their care," he used that, too. My father read Maxwell's books and was proud of their inscriptions to him and my mother, but he wasn't literary. He was impatient and earthy and impulsive. His opinions were bluntly expressed, and he was indifferent to social conventions—I doubt whether Maxwell has ever said anything pointed without considering its effect on the feelings of the person he's talking to. My father was also unhesitating in his friendship. If the phone rang and it was Maxwell saying that a storm had blown down a tree across his driveway or that his car wouldn't start, my father would stop what he was doing, find a saw or a gas can, and head down the hill to the Maxwells' house. I was aware of Maxwell among my father's friends: he was quieter than the rest of them, and his face tended to give away his feelings.

In 1976, at the age of twenty-four, I decided that I would try to become a writer, because things weren't going so well for me as a rock-and-roll musician, and I thought that by being a writer I could get rich. Then I could go back to being a musician. What I planned to write about was a year I had spent as one of nine policemen in Wellfleet, Massachusetts. I had not read many books as a child, and I'd read only a few in college. One of them was "Look Homeward, Angel," from which I retained only the phrase "The night was a cool bowl of lilac darkness." I thought that if such a description was writing I couldn't be a writer. Either you regarded the world poetically or you didn't. Nevertheless, I sat down at a typewriter and began describing the things that had happened to me as a policeman, and the remarks that I'd heard people make, and after I had been at it for a while my father asked Maxwell if he would read what I'd done.

One afternoon following another, over the course of years, as it turned out, one piece or one book succeeding another, we sat side by side at a table—sometimes at Maxwell's apartment in New York, sometimes at the house in Westchester, and sometimes in the woods surrounding a rented house in Wellfleet—and he suggested cuts or changed a word I had learned recently into plain English. "Write as if you wish to be understood by an unusually bright ten-year-old," he said, or, "Henry James said 'Dramatize, dramatize, dramatize,' not 'Generalize, generalize, generalize.' " Or he took out scissors and cut up my sentences and rearranged them and pasted them back together. Or he leaned back from the table and asked, "Isn't there a simpler way to say that?" and I explained what I had been trying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to convey, and he wrote my explanation in the margin and said, "That's it," and I was surprised to see that words I had just spoken could be writing. During the forty years that Maxwell edited fiction at *The New Yorker,* he handled such writers as Vladimir Nabokov, J. D. Salinger, John Updike, John Cheever, John O'Hara, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Eudora Welty, Shirley Hazzard, Mavis Gallant, Frank O'Connor, Larry Woiwode, and Harold Brodkey, none of whom needed his help as much as I did. I have dedicated three of my books to him, and my name is included in the dedication of one of his.

Maxwell and his wife, Emily, circa 1947: A storyteller who believes that ordinary life provides the most resonant drama.

COURTESY OF KIRK C. WILKINSON

I know that Maxwell and I are very different people, but we have spent so much time together, and been so intimate in our conversations, and I have relied so heavily on him and without realizing it have modelled certain parts of my behavior on his, that I sometimes feel as if we were nearly alike. Proof that such thinking can be carried too far came to me about ten years ago in a dream in which I went to a tailor to order my writer's coat. In the logic of the dream, having such a coat was a privilege given by a guild to an apprentice it was ready to admit. When I picked up the coat, a week later, the tailor gave me a baseball jacket made from strips of colors arranged like a hand of cards. I told him it wasn't my coat. He said it was. I said that writers' coats are blazers made of green or brown corduroy. Maxwell has a closetful of such coats.

MAXWELL is ninety-one years old. He was born on August 16, 1908, in Lincoln, Illinois. His father was the state agent for a fire-insurance company. His mother died in 1919, during the epidemic of Spanish influenza. Two years later, his father remarried and, two years after that, was promoted to a position that required him to move to Chicago, where Maxwell finished high school. He went to the University of Illinois, and did a year's graduate work in English at Harvard.

From photographs kept in a cabinet in the study of Maxwell's house in the country, I know that his features when he was a boy were so finely drawn that he looked almost like a girl. As a young man, he had a narrow face, with a long nose, full lips, and a wide, thin mouth. He had brown hair, and his eyes were dark and liquid and expressive to the point of radiance, and they still are. At parties, which he isn't especially fond of, he tends to find one person he can talk to. His voice is almost a whisper, and in order to be heard he sometimes draws a breath and pauses or hunches his shoulders and leans forward. His posture is slightly stooped from years of sitting at the typewriter. He is about five feet eight inches tall and so thin as to be nearly delicate. His skin is like paper. His health has always been robust, and he has surprising strength.

In the way a baseball player might regard himself as a participant in a tradition involving Gehrig and Ruth, Maxwell thinks of himself as engaged in an occupation that goes back to the blind old man at the crossroads—the professional storyteller, led around by a boy, addressing whoever will listen and using his skill to hold the attention of his audience as the light fades and all of them have a good reason for being home. Somewhat subversively, he believes that the patterns of ordinary life, acutely observed, provide more drama and structure and emotional resonance than purely imagined events are likely to. This is not the same as suggesting that a writer's imagination ought to surrender itself to the outward patterns of actual happenings, only that—as he writes in his novel "So Long, See You Tomorrow"—"too many conflicting emotional interests are involved for life ever to be wholly acceptable, and possibly it is the work of the storyteller to rearrange things so that they conform to this end. In any case, in talking about the past we lie with every breath we draw."

Since 1934, Maxwell has published six novels, two volumes of stories, a book of literary improvisations somewhat in the style of fables, a book of essays and reviews, a family history, two children's books, and an edition of collected stories. The fables, in "The Old Man at the Railroad Crossing," are imaginary and were mostly written for family occasions—for a birthday or at Christmas, for his wife and two daughters. He wrote them by sitting at his typewriter in an attitude of receptivity until something, he says, was handed to him, as if from his unconscious. Often, it was the phrase "Once upon a time," and from that everything else followed. "A person I didn't know anything about," he writes in the book's introduction, "and had never known in real life—a man who had no enemies, a girl who doesn't know whether to listen to her heart or her mind, a woman who never draws breath except to complain, an old man afraid of falling—stepped from the wings and began to act out something I must not interrupt or interfere with, but only be a witness to: a life, with the fleeting illuminations that anybody's life offers, written in sand with a pointed stick and erased by the next high tide." The only one of his novels that is almost entirely imagined is "Time Will Darken It," which unfolded as a series of conversations among his characters. As he began each chapter, he determined what character had not spoken to another in a while, and put down what they had to say to each other.

An autobiographical writer is often trying to deliver himself from an experience that haunts him. In several stories and two novels, Maxwell has described the death of his mother. As far as the novels are concerned, he approached the subject first in "They Came Like Swallows," published in 1937, and again in "So Long, See You Tomorrow," published in 1980. In the first book he writes about the experience directly. In the second, his way of treating it is more oblique—what he is writing about really is his mother's absence from the family and the permanent shadow such deprivation cast over the household. In the narrative the consequences of his mother's death are combined with the description and aftermath of the murder of a tenant farmer by his lover's husband. The love affair that led to the murder, and the effect of the killing on the life of the boy who lost his mother, Maxwell was obliged to imagine. The facts were no longer retrievable.

"They Came Like Swallows" was recently included in the Modern Library, and in the introduction Maxwell says that he wrote the last part in ten days:

> Much of the time I walked the floor, framing sentences in my mind and then brushing the tears away with my hand so I could see the typewriter keys. I was weeping, I think, both for what happened—for I could not write about my mother's death without reliving it—and for events that took place only in my imagination. I don't suppose I was entirely sane.

In presenting to Maxwell in 1995 the Gold Medal for Fiction of the American Academy of Arts and Letters—that body's highest award, which is given only every six years—Joseph Mitchell said, "William Maxwell's principal theme, like James Joyce's, is the

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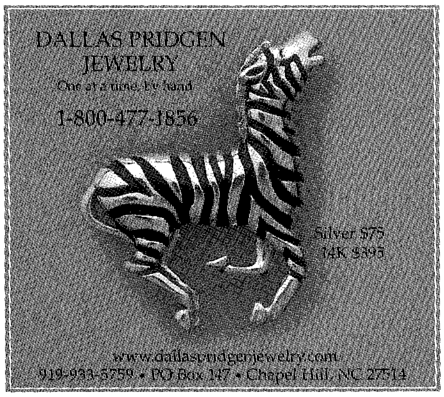
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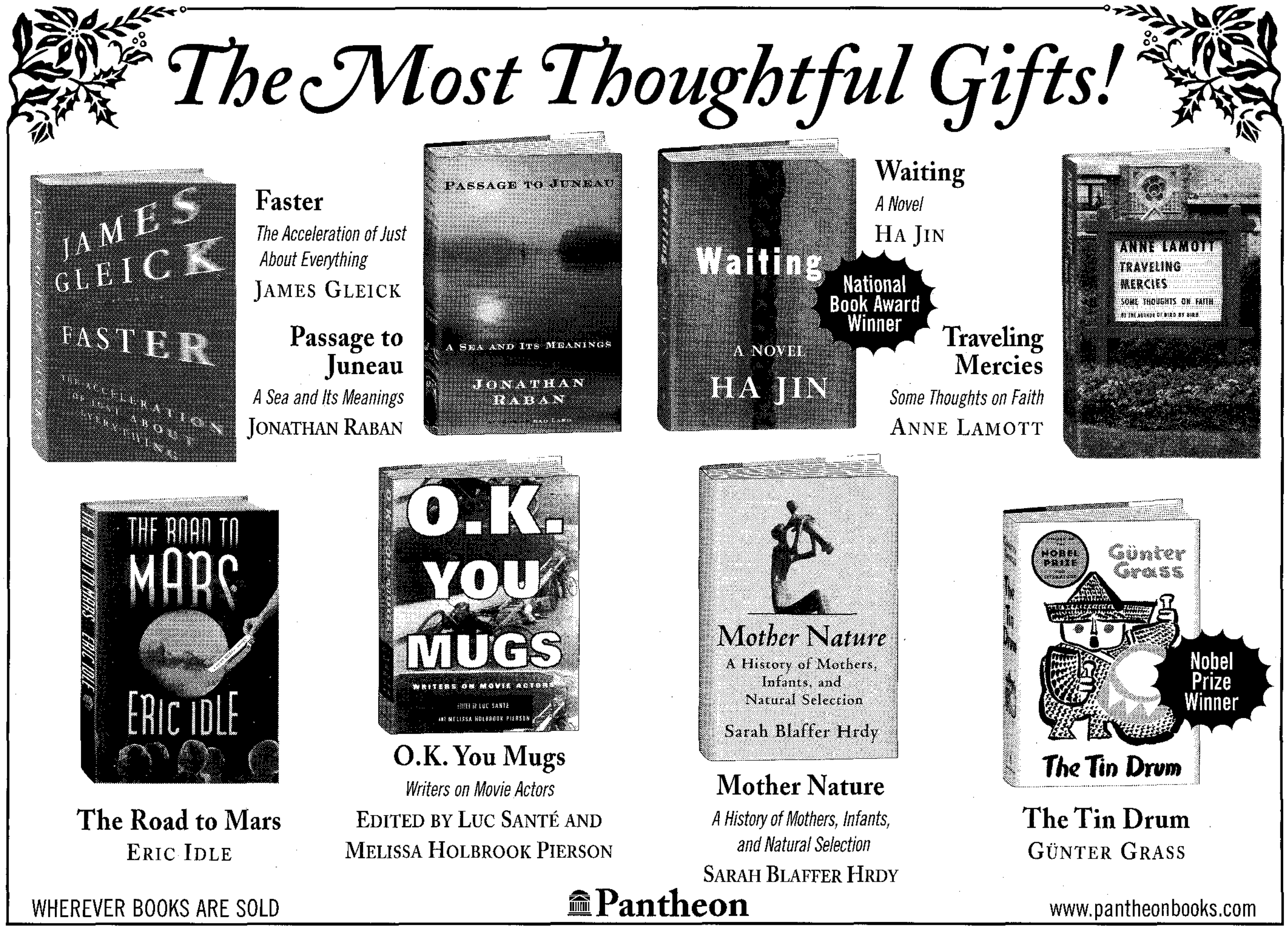
sadness that often exists at the heart of a family. . . . He is as aware as any novelist who ever lived of what human beings are capable of." Maxwell's prose is precise and understated. His stories and novels are meticulously crafted; sentences, he says, are moved around until they stick. Even so, the finished work is without any self-consciousness or sign of effort. He never strives for effect. He never performs what he used to describe scornfully to me as pirouettes on the page. Mitchell also said, "Nevertheless, in his pages one often reads with surprise descriptions and observations that seem truer and more revealing and more powerful and more memorable and more shocking than the deliberately shocking scenes and observations found in the pages of many of his contemporaries."

Maxwell says that he no longer has the inclination for sustained literary efforts, for holding the pattern of a story or a novel in mind for the time it would take to complete it. He sometimes says that he seems to have lost touch with the place where stories and novels come from. He still loves, he says, to write sentences. His disengagement from the source of his work is not something he feels reconciled to. He sometimes says that when people ask him what he is writing, even though he knows they only mean to be polite, he wants to pick up something and throw it at them.

WHEN Maxwell's last surviving brother died, about ten years ago, he realized, he says, "that no one any longer remembers the things that I do." A few years ago, Knopf published a volume of letters exchanged between Maxwell and Frank O'Connor. It is called "The Happiness of Getting It Down Right." Maxwell talks about being awakened in the middle of the night by his daughters when they were children or the difficulty he was having making a piece of writing come out or a trip he made to his in-laws on the Oregon coast, and I read the letters with a kind of fascination, because, except for the material about his childhood which appears in his books or which he has described in interviews, I knew hardly anything about his life when he was young. He was a figure from my childhood and whatever daydreams I had then didn't include imagining what older people I actually knew were doing when I didn't see them or who they might have been when they didn't look exactly as I was accustomed to having them look.

I now know that in 1933, after finishing his first novel, "Bright Center of Heaven," Maxwell came to New York from Illinois. The dust jackets of the period often said that the author had been to sea, and Maxwell hoped that if he found a ship in New York's harbor that would take him aboard, it would give him something to write about. He was twenty-five years old. At a party, he met a man who wrote popular sea stories. The man gave him a letter of introduction to the captain of a four-masted schooner that had belonged to J. P. Morgan and was anchored off Brooklyn. Maxwell hired a rowboat to take him out to the ship, where he found that the man his letter was addressed to was leaving the next day. The crew consisted of one sailor chipping rust, with a police dog beside him. The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captain read Maxwell's letter and explained that the ship had not left anchor for four years and was not likely to anytime soon.

Maxwell was living in the Railroad Men's Y.M.C.A., on East Forty-seventh Street, and in its library he came across a book from 1890 by Lafcadio Hearn which discussed the beautiful city of Saint-Pierre, Martinique. Maxwell decided to go there and then discovered that it had been destroyed by a volcanic eruption in 1902. Even so, he thought, there must be some vestiges of it, and so he booked a passage on a small, dingy freighter, in February. He got off the boat at Trinidad and stayed several days. On one of them he went to the races. In the evening, when the races were over, immigrants from India set up card tables all around the track and gambled by candlelight.

25. XII. 1993

For a miracle, take one shepherd's sheepskin, throw
In a pinch of now, a grain of long ago,
And a handful of tomorrow. Add by eye
A little bit of ground, a piece of sky,

And it will happen. For miracles, gravitating
To earth, know just where people will be waiting,
And eagerly will find the right address
And tenant, even in a wilderness.

Or, if you're leaving home, switch on a new
Four-pointed star in Heaven as you do,
To light a vacant world with steady blaze
And follow you forever with its gaze.

—JOSEPH BRODSKY

(Translated, from the Russian, by Richard Wilbur.)

From Trinidad he took a boat to Martinique, where there was a double rainbow over the harbor at Fort-de-France, and the purser gave him the name of a good pension. In an effort to gather material he wandered through the streets. The women wore the costume Hearn had described—a madras turban and a dress with a small bustle—but nothing else was recognizable. It was carnival time, and he was sometimes stopped by two or three towering young black men dressed in baby clothes, who demanded small sums of money. And there was a man with a lion's mane with bells in it who roamed the streets, followed by fifty boys chanting antiphonally. At nine o'clock, the light went on in the kitchen of the pension, and at ten food began to appear on his table, in an open courtyard. It was better food than he had ever known anywhere. At midnight, he drew mosquito netting around him as he fell into bed, drunk from the wine in his carafe. In the crotches of the trees orchids bloomed, and sewage ran down the gutters. He sometimes stood in the door of a dance hall. The music consisted of a single phrase repeated endlessly. The dancers, without moving their feet, ground their pelvises together. The book he had hoped to write eluded him.

He sat on a bluff looking out to sea. For the first time in his life he was homesick. A month in Martinique, where he went days at a time without speaking to anyone, seemed like a year anywhere else. One night when he sat down to dinner, he found a letter telling him that Harper & Brothers was seriously considering publishing "Bright Center of Heaven." He went back on the same freighter he had arrived on.

When the novel appeared, in 1934, Maxwell was hoping the newspapers would carry large ads. Instead, Harper's publicity director took him to lunch and said, "Now we must pray." The reviews said that the book was promising, and the first printing of a thousand copies sold out; the second printing didn't. The central character is a flighty woman who in her incessant pursuit of order induces disorder. She is reduced to taking paying guests, and when she invites a distinguished black man for the weekend it is more than the social fabric can bear, and there is an unmanageable and partly comic situation. Maxwell has never allowed the book to be republished.

Maxwell had just turned twenty-eight when he came to New York a second time, in August of 1936. "My father had given me a hundred dollars, and I had another hundred I didn't tell him about," he says. "I went to a friend of his, the president of an insurance company, to get the check cashed. He had always before been friendly and fatherly to me, and this time he surprised me by being harsh and telling me I had no business trying to get a job in New York, that I wouldn't make it here, and had better get back to my long-haired friends in Chicago. About whom he actually knew nothing. I had been given letters of introduction to *The New Republic* and to *Time*, and my editor at Harper's, who published E. B. White, had called Katharine White at *The New Yorker*, and asked if she would see me. I went first to *The New Republic*, and it took them only a few minutes to realize that I didn't have a political thought in my head. And it took three weeks to receive an appointment with the personnel office at *Time*. Meanwhile, my father's friend had made me so furious that I talked myself into a job reading novels for Paramount Pictures. Then I went for an interview with Katharine White.

"I hadn't been reading *The New Yorker* at all. Mrs. White was a small, handsome woman, with a Bostonian accent and a confident manner. At the end of the interview, she asked how much I would want in the way of a salary. I had been told by a knowledgeable friend that I must ask for thirty-five dollars, that they wouldn't respect me unless I did. So I took a deep breath and said thirty-five dollars, and she smiled and said, 'I expect you could live on less.' I could have lived nicely on fifteen dollars. I couldn't make out whether the interview had been favorable or not. The thought of reading manuscripts for the movies didn't make me cheerful.

"I was living on the top floor of a

brownstone rooming house at Lexington and Thirty-sixth Street, or thereabouts. I remember the mattress was lumpy, and there were bedbugs. I went down to the Village and wandered around and decided to eat dinner at a Chinese restaurant on Eighth Street, and though there were empty tables, they made me sit with another person. In a bottomless depression I said to myself, 'There is no place for me anywhere in the world.' And after dinner came home and under my door was a telegram from Mrs. White that read 'COME TO WORK ON MONDAY AT THE PRICE AGREED UPON.' "

Eventually, Mrs. White encouraged Maxwell to submit stories to the magazine. From his reading of the opinion sheets accompanying the manuscripts, Maxwell felt he understood the sort of material the magazine was looking for, and he was able to give its editors what they wanted—"valentines that arrived on the wrong day, that sort of thing," he says. "Something trivial but amusing." When he felt that the subject was too slight, he published the story under the pseudonym Jonathan Harrington.

"Somewhere along in the first three months I felt I was going to be fine, and I sent back my father's hundred dollars," Maxwell says. "When he got it, my stepmother said, he wept. He was a businessman. The concept of literature was outside his experience and beyond his understanding and so he had no idea, really, what I was up to. If my books had sold to the movies, he would have been reassured and thought I was engaged in a worthwhile occupation. In any case, he tried to understand. It had been the great fear of his life that I would be financially irresponsible and sponge off other people."

NOT long ago, I said to Maxwell, "You seem so untroubled," and he said, "I am now." In his early thirties, he lived as a solitary bachelor. "Working at *The New Yorker* five days a week was so consuming I had no other life," he says. "I lived in Patchin Place, in the West Village, in a very small two-room apartment, and I didn't have a telephone until the magazine insisted on it. And when it did ring I wouldn't answer it. I had been with people all day long and couldn't stand any more." What he wanted was a home and a family, but he felt shut out by his temperament from the part of the world where he might find them.

At the suggestion of a friend, he began seeing the psychoanalyst Theodor Reik, who had studied with Freud. "I had too great a sense of my own difference from other people," Maxwell says. "After spending a year talking with him, five days a week, though, the whole first part of my life fell away and I had a feeling of starting again. When I stopped talking to him and felt the need for it, I sat down for two days at the typewriter, and what came out was very strange. I decided that I was so angry at my parents for having another child—why weren't they satisfied with *me*?—that I thought they should die and then be brought back. I damn near accomplished it with my father, who caught the flu and recovered, but I had lost my mother. So I was a murderer. And what do you do with murderers, you put them in a cell. I was in a cell—no wife, no family. I was in a prison cell,

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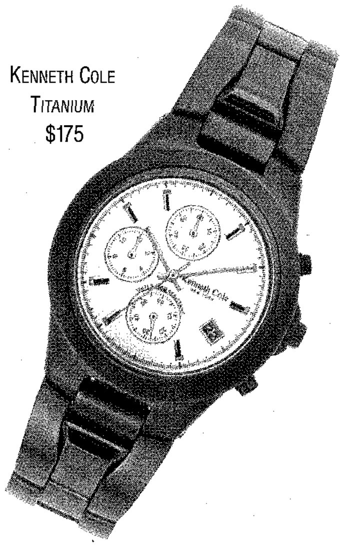

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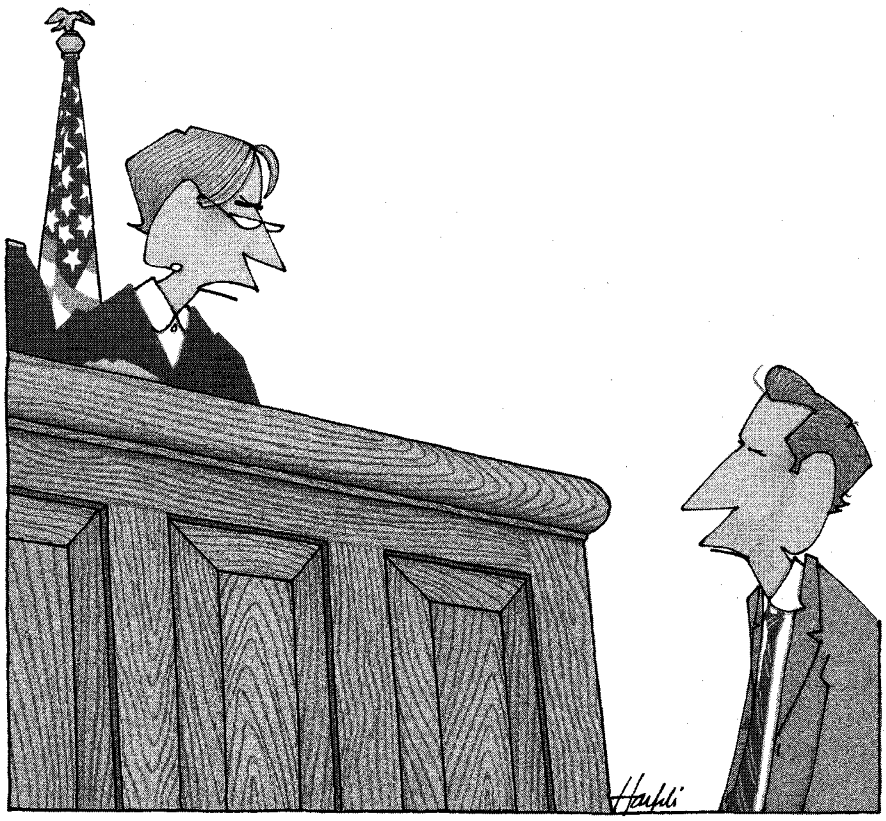
and there was Reik saying, 'You're in a prison cell, but the door's not locked.' "

In the meantime, Maxwell had moved to the house in Westchester, where, a few months later, he woke up in the middle of the night remembering a young woman who had come to his office a year and a half earlier hoping for a position in the poetry department. "She wore her hair on top of her head," he says, "and she had a hat trimmed with fur—it was winter, I suppose—and I thought I had never seen anyone so beautiful, but I did nothing about it. It was as if I'd been in a deep sleep." He tried to find her name—Emily Noyes—in the phone book, and it wasn't there, but she had left her number with the magazine's personnel office, and on the disingenuous pretext of wanting to talk to her about her poetry he asked her for a drink at the Algonquin. She was from a prosperous family in Portland, Oregon. She was teaching at a nursery school on the Upper East Side and lived on the top floor of the building. Maxwell was thirty-six, and she was twenty-three, with black hair, and a wide face, and eyes so lively that people later often took her and Maxwell for sister and brother. It was the fall, and he asked her to a party at the house of a friend. They talked all evening, and when he took her home he asked her to marry him. He hadn't planned on saying it—the words simply came out of his mouth. She said that she didn't want to get married and that she wouldn't be able to see him again until after the first of the year but in the meantime he could telephone her at the nursery school between four-fifteen and four-thirty.

At four-fifteen each day, Maxwell closed the door of his office and began dialling. More often than not, the school line was busy, but sometimes he got through to her. In January, he closed his house, rented a one-room apartment in New York, and began courting her. She had grown up on horseback and liked to play "Don't Fence Me In" on the jukeboxes in Third Avenue saloons. They were married in May, in the chapel of the First Presbyterian Church at Fifth Avenue and Twelfth Street. For more than forty years, they have divided their time between the house in the country and an apartment on the Upper East Side, over by the river.

MAXWELL quit *The New Yorker* twice. He quit the first time in the thirties, because he was indignant at having been passed over for a pro-



"You've been charged with driving under the influence of testosterone."

motion and decided that he would be a writer instead. He went to Santa Fe for several months, and when he came back Gus Lobrano, the head fiction editor, said that he missed him and asked if he could send over manuscripts for his opinion. After about a month, it became easier to read the manuscripts at the office.

He left again in 1947. "I thought I would write more and better if I did nothing but write," he says. "I was selling enough stories to live on, and I had some savings and I thought we could skid by, but the first thing that happened was we needed a new refrigerator, and the second thing that happened is that the stories I wrote weren't being taken. It helped to know what the magazine wanted, but not infallibly. Also, even though I saw what they wanted, I didn't necessarily want to give it to them. I had more serious things on my mind. But then I looked at the bank balance and my approaching fortieth birthday, and I thought I ought to insinuate myself back onto the staff."

When Maxwell was young, he was strongly attracted to Virginia Woolf's elaborate and lyrical prose, but as he got older he began to prefer writing that was formed on the writer's habitual way of speaking and was simple and to the point. He is fond of a remark by the poet John Hall Wheelock that writing involves the imposition of a line of words on a line of feeling. As an editor, he was particularly good at saving stories that didn't quite work. He would suggest possibilities for the development of a character or a line of narrative, or for compressing a scene or combining one scene with another, or for moving several sentences or a paragraph from the beginning of a piece to nearer the end or from the end to the beginning, so that the emotional tone of the story was changed, and the story was brought to life and made to reverberate in a way that it hadn't before.

What suggestions he made he offered unobtrusively, and he qualified them by saying that if the writer didn't agree with them he should overlook them. "I wanted the editing to be such that when the writer reread the story ten years after it was published he would not be aware of any hand on it but his own," he says. While I was writing my second book, I kept hearing a voice in my head saying such things as "You don't think that sentence is any good, do you?" Sabotage is what it was, but I couldn't find any way of avoiding it until Maxwell suggested that I do my writing each day in the form of a letter I mailed him. When I had disposed of everything I intended to say, I retrieved the letters and we began going through them.

As for how other writers regarded his opinion, when J. D. Salinger finished "Catcher in the Rye," he drove to the Maxwells' house in the country and in the course of an afternoon and evening read it to them on their porch.

To mark the occasion of his ninetieth birthday and his fifty years as a member of the club he belongs to in Manhattan, Maxwell wrote an essay describing two old men, both of whom he had known when he was in his forties: Austin Strong, a playwright, whose grandmother married Robert Louis Stevenson, and Rodman Gilder, a publisher. Last fall, he read what he had written at a dinner held at the club in his honor. Nearly four hundred people turned out to hear him, several hundred more than had been expected. Strong and Gilder were a generation older than Maxwell, and, in describing the end of their lives, he wrote, "The following winter when Austin did not appear at the club for a week or so I inquired of the doorman about him and was told that he had been unwell but was better and that Mrs. Strong had said visitors would be welcome. I went looking for Rodman, who said soberly, 'Heart attack.' When I was led upstairs to Austin's bedroom I found him sitting up in a fourposter. Except for his poor color he was his usual self. He said he would be back in the club soon. Instead I found myself attending his funeral."

Something about the way Maxwell said this made people draw in their breath quickly.

"Shortly after that," he went on, "Rodman sat back in his chair, with one arm behind his head, to think about something, and never finished the thought. That made two funerals. I said, I will never again love an old man. They die on you."

I have persuaded myself that he will not do this to me. ♦

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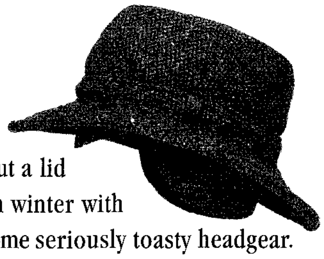

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FICTION

DOMINION

BY ROBERT STONE

"By gad, sir," Michael Ahearn said to his son, Paul, "you present a distressing spectacle."

A few nights earlier they had watched "The Maltese Falcon" together. Paul, who had never seen it before, appeared to be delighted by his father's rendition of Sydney Greenstreet. Sometimes he would even try doing Greenstreet himself.

"By gad, sir!"

Paul's attempts at movie voices were not subtle but commanded inflections normally beyond the comic repertory of a twelve-year-old boy from a small town on the northern plains. His voice and manner were coming to resemble his father's.

The boy was lying in bed with a copy of "The Hobbit" open across his counterpane. This time he was not amused at his father's old-movie impressions. He looked up with resentment. His beautiful long-lashed eyes—his mother's—were angry. But Michael easily met the reproach there. He took any opportunity to look at his son. There was something new every day, a different ray, an unexpected facet reflected in the aspects of this creature enduring his twelvedness.

"I want to go, Dad," Paul said evenly, attempting to exercise his powers of persuasion to best effect.

He had been literally praying to go. Michael knew that because he had been spying on Paul while the boy knelt beside the bed to say his evening prayers. He had lurked in the hallway outside the boy's room, watching and listening to his careful recitation of the Our Father and the Hail Mary and the Gloria—rote prayers, courtesy of the Catholic school to which the Ahearns, with misgivings, regularly dispatched him. Michael and his wife had been raised in religion and they were warily trying it on again as parents. Sending Paul to St. Emmerich's meant laughing away the horror stories they liked to tell about their own religious education in the hope of winning a few wholesome apparent certainties for the next generation.

"I was fourteen before my father took me hunting," Michael said. "I think that's the right age."

"You said kids do everything sooner."

"I didn't say I thought kids doing everything sooner was a good idea."

"You don't even like to hunt," Paul said. "You don't believe in it."

"Really? And what makes us think that?"

"Well, I've heard you with Mom. You, like, agree with her it's cruel and stuff."

"I don't agree with her. I understand her position. Anyway, if I didn't believe in it why should I take a tender runt like you?"

Paul was immune to his father's goading. He went for the substance.

"Because I really believe in it."

"Oh yes? You believe in whacking innocent creatures?"

"You know what?" Paul asked. "This was a Christian Ethics topic. Hunting was. And I was like pro—in favor. Because Genesis says 'dominion over beasts.' If you eat the meat, it's O.K. And we do."

"You don't."

"Yes, I do," Paul said. "I eat venison kielbasa."

Michael loomed over him and with his left hand put out the lamp on the bed table.

" 'Tis blasphemy to vent thy rage against a dumb brute," he informed his son. He had been teaching "Moby Dick" with his favorite assistant, a very pretty South Dakota girl named Phyllis Strom. "Now, good night. I don't want you to read too late."

"Why? I'm not going anywhere."

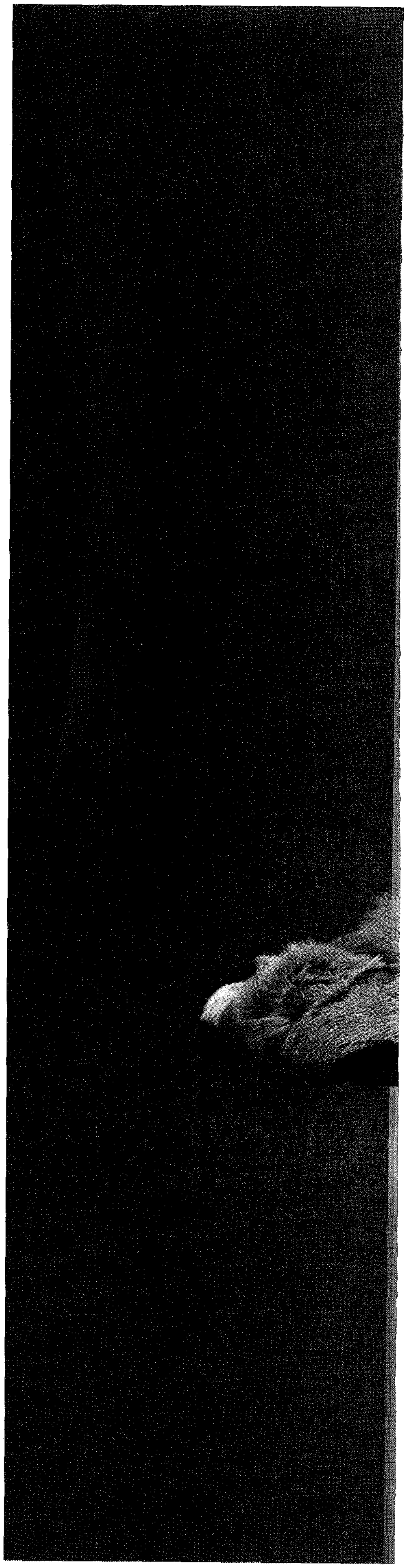
"Maybe next year," Michael said.

"Sure, Dad," said Paul.

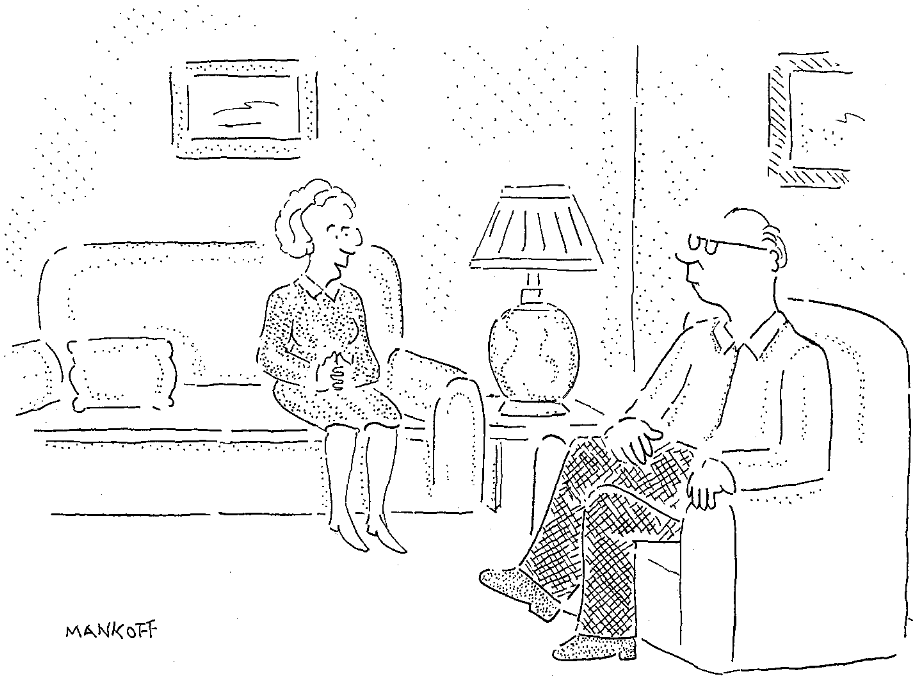
He left the bedroom door its customary inch ajar and went downstairs to the study, where his wife was grading Chaucer papers.

"Did he beg and plead?" she asked, looking up.

"I don't think he's absolutely sure if



JAMES SCHNEPF, "STILL LIFE, SHAWANO, WISCONSIN"



"What do you think sitting around being bored out of your mind will be like in the new millennium?"

he wants to go or not. But he takes a pro-hunting position."

She laughed. Her son's eyes. "A what?"

"In Christian Ethics," Michael pronounced solemnly. "Dominion over the beasts. He argues from Genesis. Christian Ethics," he repeated when she looked at him blankly. "At school."

"Oh, that," she said. "Well, it doesn't say kill the poor beasts. Or does it? Maybe one of those teachers is a gun nut."

Kristin had been raised in a Lutheran family. Although religiously inclined, she was a practical person who worked at maintaining her critical distance from dogmatic instruction, especially of the Roman variety. She concurred in Paul's attendance at the Catholic school because, to her own rather conservative but independent thinking, the position of the Catholics of their college town had incorporated Luther's reforms. Many Sundays she went to Mass with them. At Christmas, they went to both churches and every Good Friday to the Lutheran Tenebrae.

"It's him," Michael said. "It's his funny little mind."

Kristin frowned and put her finger to her lips.

"His funny little mind," Michael whispered, chastened. "He thought it up."

"He always sees you going. Not that you ever get much."

"I get birds. But deer season . . ."

"Right," she said.

The circle of unspoken thought she closed was that Michael used the pheasant season as an excuse to walk the autumn fields around their house. With the dog and a twenty-gauge shotgun borrowed from a colleague, he would set out over the frosted brown prairie, scrambling under wire where the land was not posted, past thinly frozen ponds and rutted pasture, making his way from one wooded hill to another. It was a pleasure to walk the short autumn days, each knoll bright with yellowed alder, red-brown ash, and flaming maple. And if the dog startled a pheasant into a headlong, clucking sacrificial dash he might have a shot. Or not. Then, if he brought a bird down, he would have to pluck it, trying to soften the skin by heating it on the stove without quite letting it cook, picking out the shot with tweezers. Kristin refused to do it. Michael disliked the job and did not much care for pheasant. But you had to eat them.

And in deer season, certain years, Michael would go out with a couple of friends from the university who were good shots and the kind of avid hunters he was *not*. He went for the canoe trip into the half-frozen swamp and the November woods under their first covering of snow. The silence there, in the deep woods they prowled, was broken by nothing but crows, and stay-behind chanting sparrows and the occasional distant echo of firing. If they got lucky, there might be the call of an errant Canadian wolf at night. And there were the winter birds, grosbeaks, juncos, eagles gliding silent above the tree line. And the savor of good whiskey around the potbellied stove of the cabin they used as field headquarters. Killing deer was not the object for him.

Kristin, though she had grown up on her family's farm, forever borrowing her male relatives' jackets with pockets full of jerky, tobacco plugs, and bright-red shotgun shells, mildly disapproved of hunting. At first, she had objected to Michael's going. He was nearsighted, a daydreamer.

"You shouldn't carry a weapon if you don't intend to take a deer."

"I don't shoot seriously."

"But you shouldn't shoot at all. It's worse if you wound one."

"I hardly ever discharge the piece, Kristin."

But a man had to carry one, in the deep woods, in winter. It was sinister, suspicious to encounter someone in the forest without a gun. Farmers who welcomed hunters on their land in season looked fearfully on unarmed strollers, trespassing. And sometimes, if he was standing with the others and a band of deer came in view and everyone let go, he would take his shot with the rest of them. He had never claimed one.

From the living room next to Kristin's study, their black Labrador gave up his place beside the fire and trotted over for attention. Olaf had been Paul's Christmas puppy six years before and served as Michael's shooting companion every fall. Michael bent to scratch his neck.

Kristin put her papers aside.

"Christian ethics," she said, as though she were weighing their general usefulness. "I don't think Genesis likes huntergatherers much. I think it favors the shepherds."

"I must look it up. You always learn something, right? Reading Genesis."

EARLY the next morning, two of Michael's colleagues from State came by in a Jeep Cherokee. Kristin served them coffee and handed out bagged sandwiches to take along.

Alvin Mahoney, a tall, balding historian with a rosy drinker's face, presented Michael with his hunting piece.

"Remember this? Remington twelve-gauge?"

Michael jammed three deer slugs into the magazine and pumped them forward to get the feel of the gun.

"You can put six in there," Mahoney reminded him. "Only if you do—remember they're there."

"Yep." Michael lowered the shotgun, unloaded it, and stuffed the shells in his jacket pocket.

The third hunter was a sociologist named Norman Cevic, whom students liked to think of as coming from New York, though he was actually from Iron Falls, a tough little smelter town on the lake not far away. Norman did his best to affect a streetwise quality for the small-town adolescents at the university. He was about the same age as Mahoney, twenty years older than Michael, though he seemed younger.

"Norm went out opening day," Mahoney said. "Straight out of the shotgun. So to speak."

"Wasn't it a zoo out there?" Kristin asked. "I mean humanwise?"

"Not if you know the territory," Norman said. "I didn't see a soul."

"You took the canoe?" Michael asked.

"Sure." Norman had a gravelly voice that amused the students. "Had to use it to get in there. Didn't see a soul," he told them again.

No one said anything. Paul was lurking in the kitchen doorway in his bathrobe. Norman took a sip of coffee.

"Except," he said, "Hmongs. I saw some Hmongs in the distance. Probably walked all the way in there. No snow yet."

"They need the meat," Kristin said. "They live on it."

"Roots," Norman said. "Winter greens. Squirrel. Raccoon."

"How did you know they were Hmongs?" Paul asked from his half-concealment.

"Good question," Norman said. "Smart kid. We should take him hunting next year. Want to know how?"

Paul looked to his father, then nodded.

"How I knew they were Hmongs," Norman declared, as though it were the title of a lecture. He had been cradling a Mossberg thirty-thirty in one arm while he drank his coffee. Now he put the cup down and let the rifle slip through his fingers until he was holding it by the tip of the barrel just short of the end-sight. "Because," he told Paul, "they carried their weapons by the end of the barrel. Sort of trailing the stock."

"Huh," said Alvin Mahoney.

"Which is how they carried them in Vietnam. And Hmongs are very numerous in Iron Falls. So," he said, addressing himself to young Paul, "when I see a man in deep woods carrying a rifle that way I presume he's a Hmong. Does that answer your question, my friend?"

"Yes, sir," Paul said.

"Hmongs are a tribal people in Vietnam and Laos," Norman told Paul. "Do you know where Vietnam is? Do you know what happened there?"

Paul was silent for a moment and then said, "Yes. I think so. A little."

"Good," said Norman. "Then you know more than three-quarters of our student body."

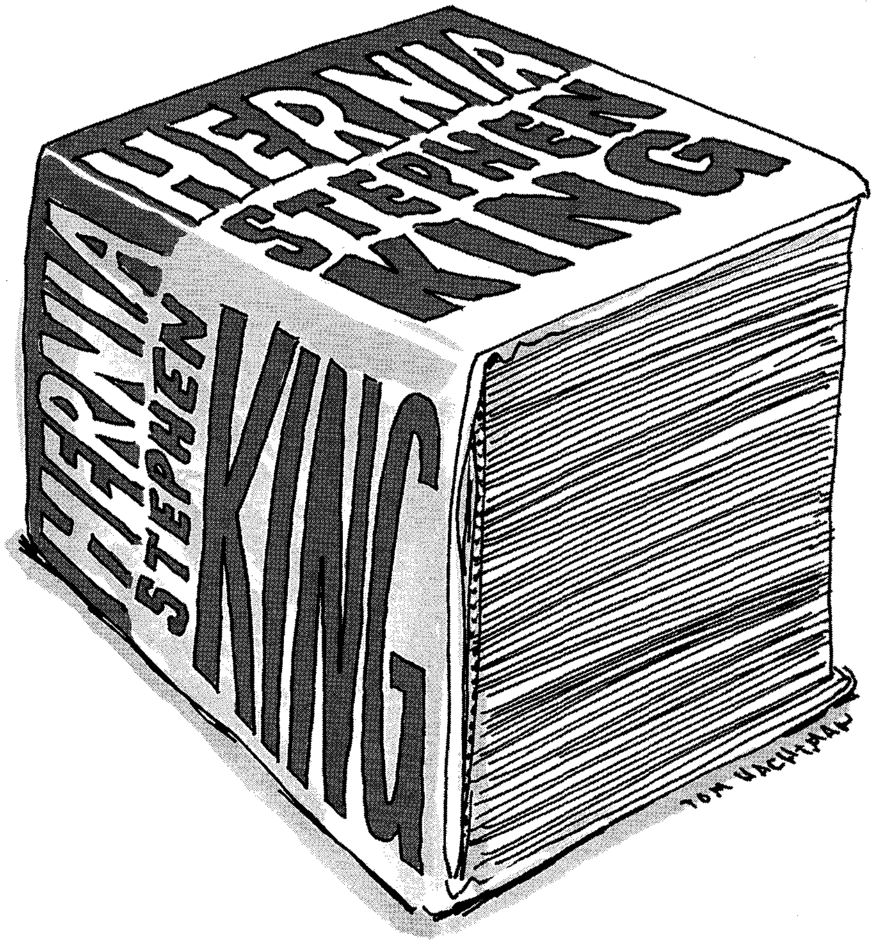
"Mr. Cevic was in Vietnam during the war," Kristin told her son. She turned to Norman, whom she rather admired. "How long was it that you spent there?"

"A year. All day, every day. And all night, too."

JUST before they left, the telephone rang. From his wife's tone, Michael knew it was his teaching assistant Phyllis Strom. Descended from prairie sodbusters, Kristin did not always trouble to enliven her voice when addressing strangers and people she disliked. She had a way of sounding very bleak indeed, and that was how she sounded then, impatiently accumulating Phyllis's information.

"Phyllis," she sternly announced. "Says she may not be able to monitor midterms on Thursday. Wonders if you'll be back?" There was an edge of unsympathetic mimicry.

Michael made a face. "Phyllis," he said. "Phyllis, fair and useless." In fact,



he felt sorry for the kid. She was engagingly shy and frightened of Kristin.

"I told her you'd left," his wife told him. "She'll call back." The new and rigorously enforced regulations required chastity in student-faculty collaborations, but Kristin was not reassured. She imagined that her anxieties about Phyllis were a dark, close secret.

"Do I really have to come back for this?" Michael said as they went out to the car. "I'll call you from Ehrlich's tomorrow night after six."

They drove past dun farm fields, toward the huge wooded marshes that lined the Three Rivers where their narrow valleys conjoined. In about four and a half hours they passed Ehrlich's, a sprawling pseudo-Alpine *bierstube* and restaurant.

"I want to go on to the Hunter's," Michael said.

"The food's not as good," Mahoney said mildly.

"True," said Michael. "But Hunter's sells an Irish single malt called Willoughby's on their retail side. Only place they sell the stuff west of Minneapolis. And I want to buy a bottle for us to drink tonight."

"Ah," Mahoney said. "Sheer bliss."

On his tongue, the phrase could only be ironic, Michael thought. Bliss was unavailable to Mahoney. It was simply not there for him, though Michael was sure he'd like the Willoughby's well enough. But for me, Michael thought, bliss is still a possibility. He imagined himself as still capable of experiencing it, a few measures, a few seconds at a time. No need of fancy whiskey, the real thing. He felt certain of it.

"How's Kristin?" Norman asked Michael.

"How do you mean, Norm? You just talked to her."

"Has she seen Phyllis Strom this term?"

"Oh, come on," Michael said. "Think she's jealous of little Phyllis? Kris could swallow Phyllis Strom with a glass of water."

Norman laughed. "Let me level with you, buddy. I'm scared to death of Kristin. Fire and ice, man."

Mind your business, he thought. Cevic had appointed himself sociologist to the north country. In fact, Michael thought, at home the ice might be almost imperceptibly thickening. Kristin had taken to rhapsodizing more and more about her father, upon whose forge her elegantly shaped, unbending angles had been hammered. The god in the iron mask, mediator of manhood and its measure. Still alive under the granite. A man might well dread his own shortcomings in that shadow.

"Smartest move I ever made," said Michael, "marrying that girl. Definitely sleep nights."

Perhaps, he thought, that had not been the best way to phrase it, for Cevic the curious and curiously minded.

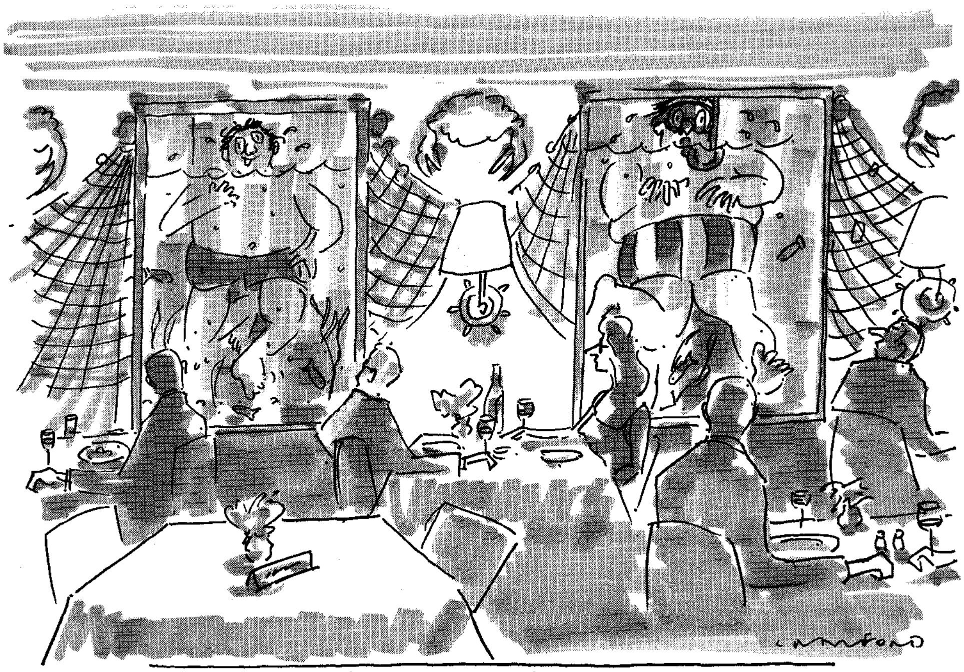
The landscape grew more wooded as they approached Mahoney's cabin, where they planned to spend the night. Farm fields gave way to sunken meadows lined with bare oak and pine forest. Thirty miles along, they came to the Hunter's Supper Club, a diner in blue aluminum and silver chrome. Incongruously attached to the diner, extending from it, was a building of treated pine logs with a varnished door of its own. At eye level on the door was the building's single window, a diamond-shaped spy hole, double-glazed and tinted green. A hand-painted sign the length of the roof read "Souvenirs Tagging Station."

They parked beside the half-dozen battered cars in the lot, and walked across the sandy, resin-scalded ground and into the metal diner. There were banquettes and a counter and a heavy young waitress in a checkered dress and blue apron. The restaurant itself was empty except for two old farmers at the counter, who shifted themselves arthritically to see who had come in. From the bar, which sounded more crowded, came jukebox music. Waylon Jennings' "Lowdown Freedom."

Their table looked out on the empty two-lane highway. Michael ordered coffee with his ham and eggs and got up to buy the whiskey at the adjoining bar.

The bar had eight or nine customers, half of them middle-aged men, burnt-up drunk, unhealthy-looking and ill-disposed. There were also two Indian youths with ponytails and druggy, glittery eyes. One had a round, apparently placid face. The other was lean and edgy, his features set in what at first appeared to be a smile but wasn't. Michael stood at the take-away counter, resolutely minding his own business. Then the barmaid, whom he had not seen at first, came out from some storage space behind the mirror and the stacked bottles and the pigs'-feet jars.

The barmaid looked only just old enough to serve liquor. She had jet-black hair and brilliant blue eyes evenly set, a thin perfect nose and long pale lips without a



OPEN-TANK NIGHT AT SAL'S KING KRAB KASTLE trace of lipstick. She was tall, wearing black cowgirl clothes, a rodeo shirt with little waves of white frosting and mother-of-pearl buttons. Her hair was thick and swept to one side at the back.

"Say," she said.

"Do you have Willoughby's today?"

"Could be we do," she said. "Like, what is it?"

Michael pondered other, different, questions. Could he drive out every Friday and Saturday and have a Friday and Saturday kind of cowboy life with her? But not really. But could he? Would she like poetry with a joint, after sex? Not seriously. Idle speculation.

"It's whiskey," he told her. He thought he must sound impatient. "It's unblended Irish whiskey. You used to carry it."

"Unblended is good, right? Sounds good. What you want."

"Yes," Michael said. "It is. It's what I'm after."

"If it's good, we mostly don't have it," she said.

And he was, as it were, stumped. No comeback. No zingers.

"Really?" he asked.

Someone behind, one of the young Indians it might have been, did him in falsetto imitation. "Really?" As though it were an outrageously affected, silly-ass question.

"But I can surely find out," she said.

When she turned away he saw that her black pants were as tight as they could be and cut to stirrup length like a real cowgirl's, and her boot heels scuffed but not worn down from walking. He also saw that where her hair was swept to the side at the back of her collar what appeared to be the forked tongue of a tattooed snake rose from either side of the bone at the nape of her neck. A serpent, ascending her spine. Her skin was alabaster.

He heard voices from the back. An old man's voice raised in proprietary anger. When she came back she was carrying a bottle, inspecting it.

"What do you know?" she said. "Specialty of the house, huh? You Irish?"

Michael shrugged. "Back somewhere. How about you?"

"Me? I'm like everybody else around here."

"Is that right?"

"Megan," one of the smoldering drunks at the bar muttered, "get your butt over this way."

"George," Megan called sweetly, still addressing Michael, "would you not be a knee-walking piece of pig shit?"

She took her time selling him the Willoughby's. Worn menace rumbled down the bar. She put her hand to her ear. Hark, like a tragedienne in a Victorian melodrama.

"What did he say?" she asked Michael, displaying active, intelligent concern.

Michael shook his head. "Didn't hear him."

As he walked back to the diner section, he heard her boots on the wooden flooring behind the bar.

"Yes, Georgie, baby pie. How may I serve you today?"

Back in the restaurant, their table had been cleared.

"He ate your eggs," Norman said, indicating Alvin Mahoney.

"Naw, I didn't," Alvin said. "Norm did."

"Anyway," Norman said, "they were getting cold. You want something to take along?"

Michael showed them the sack with the whiskey.

"I'll just take this. I'm not hungry." When he tasted his untouched coffee, it was cold as well.

Beyond the Hunter's Supper Club, the big swamp took shape, and snow was falling before they reached the cabin. They followed the dirt road to it, facing icy, wind-driven volleys that rattled against the windshield and fouled the wipers. As they were getting their bags out of the trunk, the snow's quality changed and softened, the flakes enlarged. A heavier silence settled on the woods.

As soon as it grew dark, Michael opened the Willoughby's. It was wonderfully smooth. Its texture seemed, at first, to impose on the blessedly warm room a familiar quietude. People said things they had said before, on other nights sheltering from other storms in past seasons. Norman Cevic groused about Vietnam. Alvin Mahoney talked about the single time he had brought his wife to the cabin.

"My then wife," he said. "She didn't much like it out here. Naw, not at all."

Michael turned to look at Alvin's worn, flushed country face with its faint mottled web of boozy angiomas. Then wife? Alvin was a widower. Where had he picked up this phrase to signal the louche sophistication of *la ronde*? Late wife, Alvin. Dead wife. Because Alma or Mildred or whatever her obviated name was had simply died on him. In what Michael had conceived of as his own sweet silent thought, he was surprised by his bitterness, his sudden, pointless, contemptuous anger.

He finished his glass. At Alvin's age, given their common vocabulary of features, their common weakness, he might come to look very much the same. But the anger kept swelling in his throat, beating time with his pulse, a vital sign.

"Well," Norman said, "all is forgiven now."

Michael, distracted by his own thoughts, had no idea what Cevic was talking about. What was forgiven? All? Forgiven whom?

IN the morning they helped Alvin secure the cabin. His twelve-foot aluminum canoe was in a padlocked shed down the hill. Getting the canoe out, they found the padlock broken, but the burglars, in their laziness and inefficiency, had not managed to make off with the boat. One year they had found the bow full of hammered dents. Still working in darkness, they placed the canoe in its fittings atop the Jeep.

A blurred dawn was unveiling itself when they reached the stream that would take them into the islands of the swamp. There was still very little light. Black streaks crisscrossed the little patch of morning, the day's inklings. They loaded the canoe by flashlight. Glassy ice crackled under their boots at the shore's edge.

Michael took the after paddle, steering, digging deep into the slow, black stream. He kept the flashlight between the seat and his thigh so that its shaft beams would sweep the bank. Paddling up front, Norman also had a light.

"Nice easy stream," Alvin said. "I keep forgetting."

"It speeds up a lot toward the big river," Michael said. "There's a gorge."

"A minor gorge," Norman said.

"Yes," said Michael. "Definitely minor."

"But it gets 'em," said Cevic. "Every

spring they go. Half a dozen some years." He meant drowned fishermen.

Yards short of the landing, Michael picked up the flashlight, lost his gloved grip, and sent it tumbling over the side. He swore.

They circled back, and riding the slight current got a look at the flashlight resting on the bottom, lighting the weedy marbled rocks seven, maybe eight feet below.

They circled again.

"How deep is it?" Alvin asked, and answered his own question. "Too deep."

"Too deep," Michael said. "My fault. Sorry."

"No problem," Norman said. "I've got one. And it's getting light."

By the time they had off-loaded, the day had composed itself around the skeletal woods, each branch bearing a coat of snow. They fanned out from the river, within sight of the glacial rock face that would be their rendezvous point. Each man carried a pack of provisions, a gun, a compass, and a portable stand. Michael made for high ground, following a slope north of the rock. The snow was around four inches deep. He saw quite a few deer tracks, the little handprints of raccoons, the hip-hop brush patterns of rabbits. There were others, too, suggesting more exciting creatures, what might be fox, marten, or wolverine.

He fixed his stand in the tallest tree among a cluster of oaks on sloping, rocky ground. The view was good, commanding a deer trail out of the pines above him which led toward the river. Now the animals would be prowling down from the high ground where they had passed the night, struggling only slightly in the new-fallen layer, browsing for edibles. He waited. Invisible crows warned of his presence.

Then there commenced the curious passage into long silence, empty of event. Confronted by stillness without motion, a landscape of line and shadow which seemed outside time, he took in every feature of the shooting ground, every tree and snowy hummock. It was always a strange, suspended state. Notions thrived.

He watched, alert for the glimpse of streaked ivory horn, the muddy camouflage coat incredibly hard to define against the mix of white, the shades of brown tree trunks and waving dark evergreen. Braced for that flash of the flag. Every sound became the focus of his concentration. He got to know each tree, from the adjoining oak to the stand of tall pines at the top of the rise.

Michael had come armed into the woods for the customary reason, to simplify life, to assume an ancient, uncomplicated identity. But the thoughts that surfaced in his silence were not comforting. The image of himself, for instance, as an agent of providence. The fact that for every creature things waited.

He regretted coming out. Somehow he could not make the day turn out to be the one he had imagined and looked forward to. The decision about whether to shoot led straight back to the life he had left in town. To other questions: who he was, what he wanted. To the wintry shadows across his bond with Kristin. He sat with the safety off, tense, vigilant, unhappy, waiting for the deer. He considered the wind, although there was hardly any.

The empty time passed quickly, as such time, strangely, often did. It was late in the darkening afternoon when he heard a voice. As soon as he heard it, he applied the safety on his shotgun.

The voice was a man's. At first, Michael thought the man was singing. But as the voice grew closer, he realized that the slight musical quality there reflected pain. He came completely out of the long day's trance and prepared to get down and help. Then, the vocalist still approaching, he caught the anger, the quality in the voice that dominated all others, the rage of someone utterly beside himself. Presently the words came—obscenities, strung together without a breath, alternately bellowed and shrieked as though they were coming from someone walking with difficulty. It still seemed possible to Michael that someone was hurt.

He scanned the woods in front of him, then adjusted his position to take in the ground just over his shoulder. At that point, he saw the fool.

A man about fifty came out of the pine cover forty yards away, slightly up the slope. If Michael's stand had not been placed so high, he realized, the man might easily have seen him. But the man's attention was altogether focussed on the buck he had brought down, a fine ten-pointer with a wide rack.

"Oh shit," he cried piteously, "oh goddam fucking shit cocksucker."

He was struggling with the odd wheelbarrow across which he had slung his prize deer. It was a thing full of seams and joins and springs. Though it appeared large enough to contain the kill, it could not, and its inutility was the source of his sobs and curses and rage and despair. As the unfortunate man shoved and hauled, pushed and pulled his burden, covering the ground by inches, the extent of his rage became apparent. To Michael, observing from the tree, it was terrifying.

And justified. Because against every snow-covered rock and log the wheels of the weird contraption locked. Its useless container spilled forth the corpse of the deer and its antlers caught on the brush. Each time, the hunter manhandled it back aboard, whereupon it fell out again the other way, and the crazy wheelbarrow tipped on its side, and the handle slid from his grasp and he screeched in impotent but blood-chilling fury. Some men were poets when they swore. But the hunter below was not a poet; he was humorless and venomous and mean.

On and on, tripping on boulders, slipping on the ice and falling on his ass, endlessly locked in a death grip with his victim as though he had single-handedly strangled the poor thing.

"Oh shit, oh goddam shit the fuck cocksucker."

And when he stopped to stand to one side and kick the contraption—and followed that by kicking the deer—Michael, hardly daring to stir lest he be seen, buried his face in his sleeve against the trunk to repress the laughter welling up in him.

But now the fool, following the deer trail in his one-man danse macabre, was coming under the sparse bare branches of Michael's very tree. Michael could see his eyes and they were terrible and his red face and the freezing spittle on his graying beard. The man was covered with blood. He was humiliated and armed. Michael prayed that he would not look up.

He held his breath and watched fascinated as the man and the deer and the wheelbarrow passed beneath him in fits and starts and howlings. If the hunter below was possessed of the violent paranoid's tortured intuition, of the faintest sense of being spied on in his ghastly mortification—if he tilted back his head

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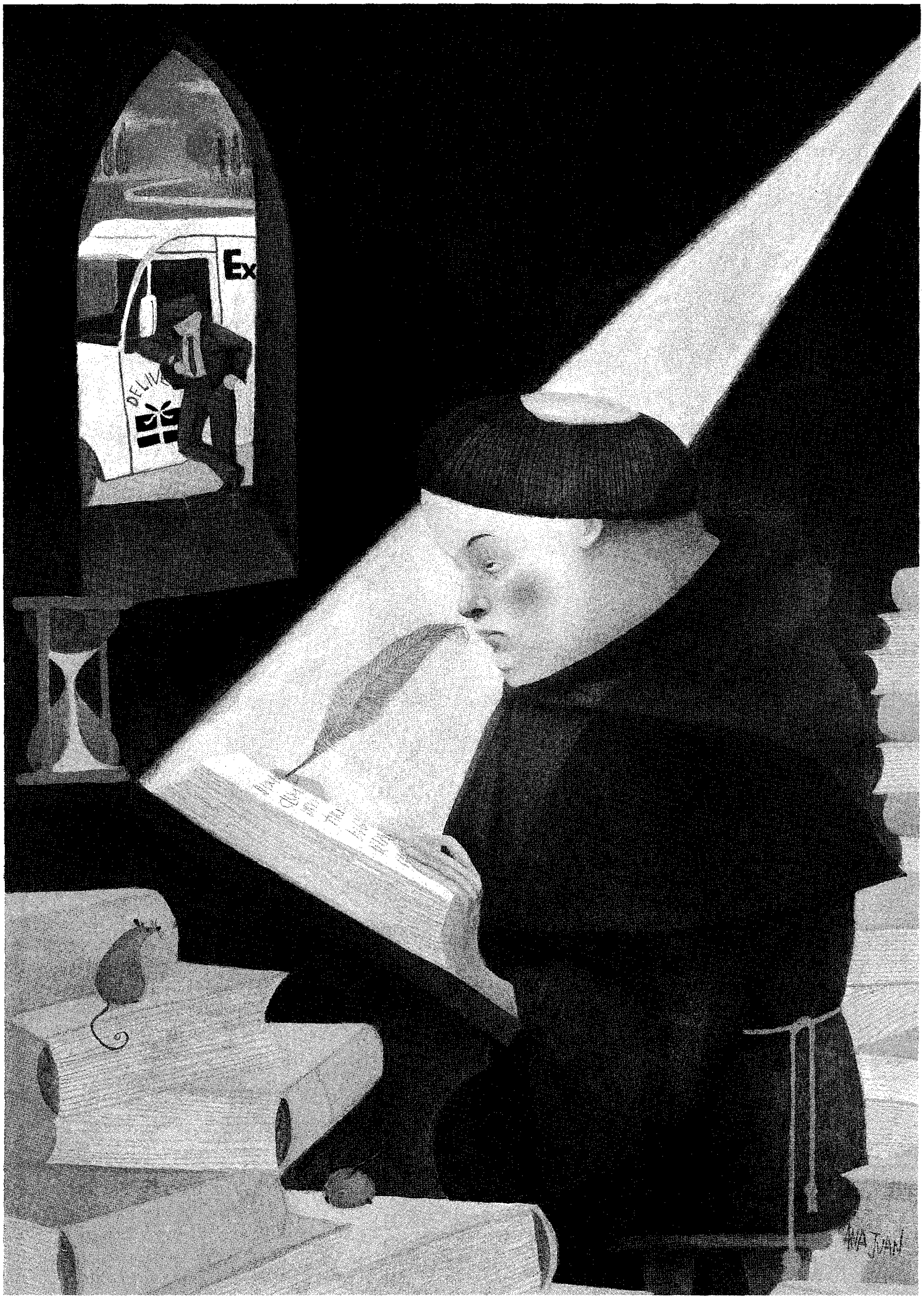
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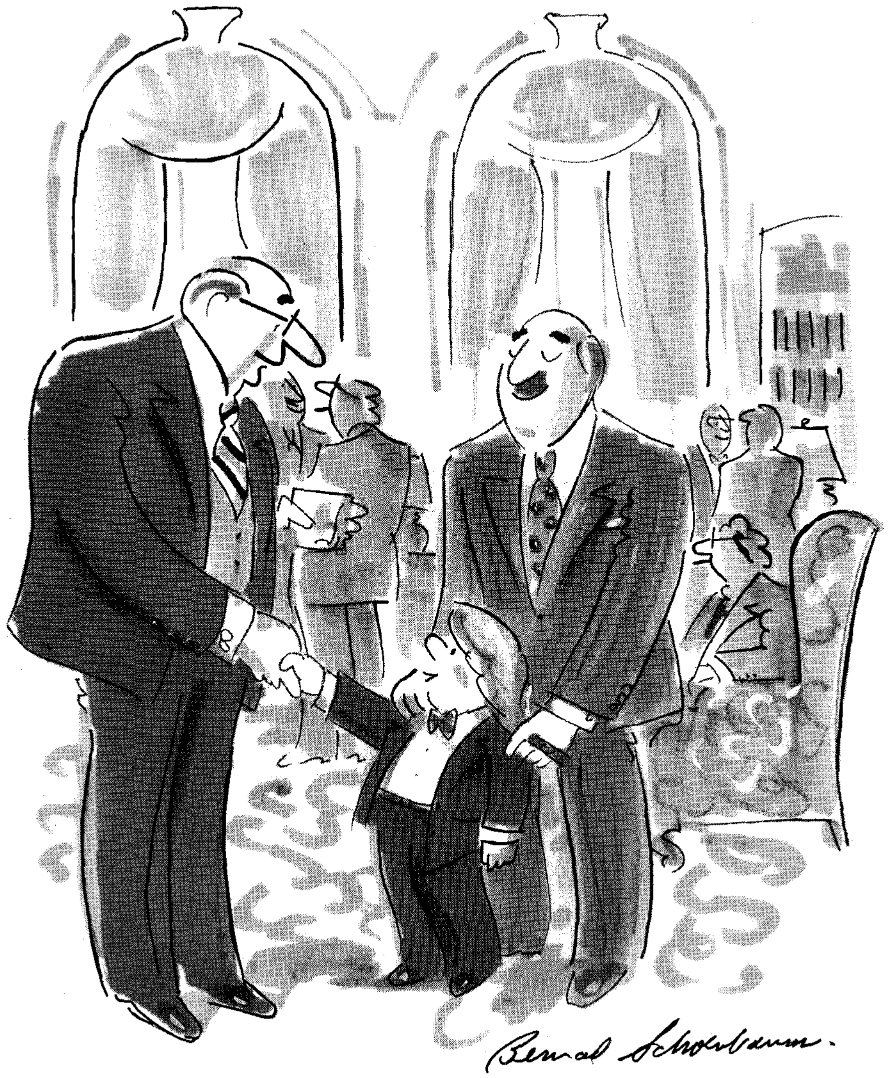


"Hi. I'm Wendell, Jr. I'm six and I'm fully invested."

• •

far enough to wail at the sky—he would see the witness to his folly. High above him lurked a Day-Glo-painted watcher in a tree, his masked, delighted face warped in a fiendish grin. If he sees me, Michael thought suddenly, he will kill me. Michael slipped his shotgun's safety off and put his gloved finger at the trigger.

Iced by fear, Michael's hilarity was transformed into a rage of his own. Oh priceless, he thought. Bozo sits up late drinking Old Bohemian in his trailer. In between commercials for schools that will teach him to drive an eighteen-wheeler and make big money, or be a forest ranger and give people orders and live in the open air instead of cleaning shovels down at the guano mill, he sees an ad for this idiotic conveyance to haul killed deer out of the forest. No more jacklighting them off the Interstate ramp or chainsawing road kill, hell no, he'll go into the forest like a macho male man with his nifty collapsible wheelbarrow. Folds up into twenty-five tiny parts so you can stick it in your back pocket like a roll-up measuring tape or wear it on your belt. It was shocking, he thought, the satisfaction you took in contemplating another man's disgrace. Another man's atoned for your own.

Finally, cursing and howling, the hunter bore his burden on. When he was gone, Michael realized he had been tracking the man down the barrel of his shotgun, every stumbling inch of the way. He shivered. It had got colder, no question. A wind had come up, whistling through the branches, rattling the icy leaves that still clung to them. When he looked at his watch, it was nearly four and time for the rendezvous. He tossed his pack, climbed from his tree, and set out for the base of the granite rock where he had left the others.

ALVIN MAHONEY was already waiting, hunkering down out of the wind. He stood up when Michael approached.

"See anything?"

"No deer. I did have something to watch though."

Norman Cevic came trudging up from the direction of the creek, his red-banded felt hat low over his eyes.

"So, I didn't hear any firing, fellas. Nothing to report?"

With all the suppressed energy of his long solitary day, Michael spun out the story of the sorry, angry man and his wonderful device.

"Didn't you hear the guy?" he asked his friends.

Norman said he had heard nothing but crows and wind in the trees.

"Poor bastard," Alvin said.

"You're lucky," Norman said. "Lucky he didn't look up and shoot you. A local. Probably needs the meat."

Michael wiped his lenses with a Kleenex. "You're breaking my heart."

"Revenge on the underclass," Norman said. "Nothing like it."

"Oh, come on," said Michael. "Don't be so fucking high-minded."

"We all enjoy it," Norman said. Then he said, "You know more game wardens get killed in the line of duty than any other law-enforcement officer?"

For a while they talked about populism and guns and militiamen. They had fallen silent in the dimming light when Alvin silently put a delaying hand on Michael's arm. Everyone stopped where they stood. There were deer, four of them, an eight-point buck and three females. One of the females looked little older than a yearling. The deer were drinking from the icy river, upstream, upwind. The three men began to ease closer to the stream, where a bend would provide them a clear line of fire. The deer were something more than thirty-five yards away. Michael tried shuffling through the snow, which was topped with a thin frozen layer, just thick enough ice to sound underfoot. He stepped on a frozen stick. It cracked. One of the does looked up and in their direction, then returned to her drinking. Finally, they came to a point beyond the tree line and looked at one another.

The target of choice would be the big buck. If they were after meat, the does, even the youngest, were legal game. The buck was splashing his way to the edge of deep water. In a moment all four of the deer tensed in place, ears up. A doe bent her foreleg, ready to spring. There was no more time. Everyone raised his weapon. Michael, without a scope, found himself sighting the shoulder of the buck. It was a beautiful animal. Magical in the fading light. Things change, he thought. Everything changes. His finger was on the trigger. When the other men fired, he did not. He had no clear idea why. Maybe the experience of having a man in his sights that day.

The buck raised his head and took a step forward. His forelegs buckled, and he shifted his hindquarters so that somehow his hind legs might take up the weight being surrendered by his weakening body. Michael watched the creature's dying. It was always hard to watch their legs give way. You could feel it in your own. The pain and vertigo.

"If he falls in that stream," Norman said, "he'll float halfway to Sioux City."

But the animal staggered briefly toward the bank and toppled sidewise into the shallows. The does vanished without a sound.

"Did you take a shot?" Norman asked Michael. Michael shook his head.

Examining the kill, they found two shotgun wounds close to the animal's heart.

"Guess we both got him," Norman said.

"He's yours," said Alvin. "You shot first."

Norman laughed. "No, man. We'll have the butcher divide him. Three ways."

Michael helped drag the dead deer by its antlers out of the water.

"Anybody want to mount that rack?" Norman asked.

"I don't think my wife would live with it," Michael told him.

"Mine either," Norman said. "Anyway it's not trophy size."

THEY were only a short distance from the canoe, but it was dark by the time they had hauled the deer aboard. Paddling upriver, they came to the place where Michael had dropped his flashlight overboard. The beam was still soldiering on, illuminating the bottom of the stream.

They secured the buck to the hood of their Jeep and set out for the state highway. This time they did not stop at the Hunter's Supper Club but drove all the way to Ehrlich's to get the deer tagged. When they had finished the forms for Fish & Game, they went into the restaurant and sat down to dinner. Mahoney was the designated driver and abstained from drink. He would, Michael thought, make up for it at home. He and Norman had Scotch, but it was not nearly as good as the Willoughby's. Then they ordered a pitcher of beer.

The menu featured wurst, schnitzel, potato pancakes, noodles, and dumplings. There were deer heads and antlers with brass plaques on the dark wood walls and scrolled mottos in Gothic script. A polka was on the jukebox and the place was filled with hunters. At Ehrlich's many of the hunters had family members along. There were women and children, even babies. Happy couples danced. The entire place rejoiced in an atmosphere of good-hearted revelry.

"Boy, is this place ever different from the Hunter's," Michael said. "It's not just the food."

"Know why?" Norman asked.

"Different people," said Michael.

"Different folks," Norman said. "This is Prevost County. They're Germans here. They're peace-loving. Orderly. You gotta love 'em."

"Do you?"

"Sure. Whereas the Hunter's is in the fucking swamp. Harrison County. Irish, Scotch-Irish. French Canadian. They're poor and surly. They're over at the Hunter's getting nasty drunk and selling one another wolf tickets. While here, *hier ist frölich*."

He spread his arms, and with a cold, false smile enacted a parody of gemütlichkeit.

"Maybe we belong over there," Alvin Mahoney said.

Michael and Norman looked at each other and laughed.

Norman raised his beer glass. "Here's looking at you, Alvin," he said.

Alvin laughed. He was nervous, drinkless. It might be safer driving, Michael thought, to let him have a belt.

Michael was aware of Norman's watching him. "You didn't shoot today," Norman said.

Michael shrugged.

As they were waiting for the check, Norman said, "I have to ask you something. Over at St. Emmerich's, what are they teaching my friend Paulie about abortion? Me, I don't think there's much wrong with the world that doesn't come from there being too many people."

Michael poured out the last of the beer.

"I'm sorry," Norman said. "You're the only person I know to ask."

For the second time Michael was annoyed with Norman. Of course, sociologizing was the man's job. And he had never been subtle or discreet. He had been to Vietnam. He owned the big questions.

"They don't talk about it," Michael said. "Not at that level." He put a paper napkin to a tiny puddle of foam on the table before him. "They talked about hunting the other day." What he said was not exactly true. Paul was being taught that life began at conception. The rest, of course, would follow. But Michael was not in the mood to defend the theses of St. Emmerich's Christian instruction. Embarrassed, he flushed and hid behind his beer. He felt besieged. As though they were trying to take something away from him. Something he was not even sure he possessed.

Because I believe, he thought. They know I believe. If I believe. But faith is not what you believe, he thought. Faith was something else.

A blond waitress with a pretty, wholesome smile came over to them but she did not have the check.

"Is one of you guys Michael Ahearn?" she asked.

"Me," Michael said.

"Sir, you got a phone call. Want to take it in the kitchen?"

He followed her across the room, resounding with polkas, laughter, the rattle of plates and foaming schooners. In the kitchen three generations of women, the oldest in her late sixties, the youngest a little older than his son, worked purposefully. The warm room smelled of vinegary marinades. His wife was on the phone.

"Michael," she said. Her voice was distant and, he thought, chill. It made him think of the woods. Or of the light shining at the bottom of the freezing stream. "Paul is *not* accounted for. He was at the gym and then I thought he was going to Jimmy Collings'. But he's not there. And his schoolbooks are here. And Olaf is missing." She paused. "It's snowing here."

He remembered the deer at the edge of the stream. Its life ebbing, legs giving way.

"I suppose I called for moral support," she said. "I'm afraid."

"Hang in," he told her.

He walked unseeing back through the noisy room. Alvin and Norman were paying the check. Michael went into his wallet, took out two twenties, and threw them on the table.

"That's too much," Norman said.

"Kristin is worried about Paul. He's out late."

"I think he eloped with June," Norman said. "She's hot for him." June was Norman's wife. Then he looked at Michael and saw how things stood.

It was snowing on Ehrlich's parking lot when they got to the Jeep. Alvin checked the lines securing the carcass of the deer. Michael took a back seat.

"You know," Alvin said, "kids are always getting up to some caper and you get all hot and bothered and it's nothing."

It was the last thing anyone said on the ride home.

The snow came harder as they drove, slowing them down. Michael watched it fall. He thought of the man with the deer in his wheelbarrow. By gad, sir, you present a distressing spectacle. If he could make it up somehow. His thoughts had all been mean and low. What he did *not* want in his mind's eye now was his son's face. But it was there after all and the boy under snow. Hang in.

"Did I pass out?" he asked them.

"You were sleeping," Norman said.

How could he sleep? He had slept but forgotten nothing. His boy had been there the whole time. Prayer. No. You did not pray for things. Prayers, like Franklin's key on a kite, attracted lightning, burned out your mind and soul.

When, hours later, they drove into town there were dead deer hanging from the trees on everyone's lawn. The lawns were wide in that prairie town. They supported many trees and almost every bare tree on almost every lawn in front of almost every house had a dead deer, or even two, slung over the low boughs. There were bucks and does and fawns. All fair game, legal. There were too many deer.

A police car was blocking Michael's driveway. Norman parked the Jeep on the street, across the lawn from his front door. Everyone got out and when they did the young town policeman, whom Michael knew, whose name was Vandervliet, climbed out of his cruiser.

"Sir," Vandervliet said, "they're not here. They're at MacIvor."

MacIvor was the tri-county hospital on the north edge of town.

Norman put a hand on his shoulder. Michael climbed into Vandervliet's Plymouth cruiser.

"What?" Michael asked the young cop. "Is my son alive?"

"Yes, sir. But he's suffering from exposure."

And it did not sound so good because as they both knew the cold, at a certain point, was irreversible, and all the heat, the fire, the cocoa, hot-water bottles, sleeping bags, down jackets, quilts, whiskey, medicine, nothing could make a child stop trembling and his temperature rise.

"Your wife is injured, Professor. I mean she ain't injured bad but she fell down trying to carry the boy I guess and so she's admitted also over there at MacIvor."

"I see," Michael said.

"See, the boy was looking for the dog 'cause the dog was out in the snow."

On the way to the hospital, Michael said, "I think I'm going to shoot that dog."

"I would," said Vandervliet.

At MacIvor, they were waiting for him. There was a nurse whose husband ran the Seattle-inspired coffee shop in town and a young doctor from back East. They looked so agitated, he went numb with fear. The doctor introduced himself but Michael heard none of it.

"Paul's vital signs are low," the doctor said. "We're hoping he'll respond. Unfortunately he's not conscious and we're concerned. We don't know how long he was outside in the storm."

Michael managed to speak. "His body temperature . . . ?"

"That's a cause of concern," the doctor said. "That will have to show improvement."

Michael did not look at him.

"We can treat this," the doctor said. "We see it here. There's hope."

"Thank you," Michael said. Above all, he did not want to see the boy. That fair vision and he kept repelling it. He was afraid to watch Paul die, though surely even in death he would be beautiful.

"We'd like you to talk to . . . to your wife," the doctor said. "We're sure she has a fracture and she won't go to X-ray." He hesitated for a moment and went off down the corridor.

At MacIvor the passageways had the form of an "X." As the doctor walked off down one bar of the pattern, Michael saw what appeared to be his wife at the end of the other. She was in a wheelchair. The nurse followed him as he walked toward her.

"She won't go to X-ray," the nurse complained. "Her leg's been splinted and she's had pain medication and we have a bed ready for her but she won't rest. She won't let the medication do its thing."

Kristin, huge-eyed and white as chalk, wheeled herself in their direction. But when Michael came up, the nurse in tow, she looked through him. There was an open Bible on her lap.

The nurse went to take the handles of Kristin's wheelchair. Michael stepped in and took them himself. Do its thing? He had trouble turning the wheelchair around. The rear wheels refused to straighten out. Do their thing. He pushed his wife toward the wall. Her splinted right leg extended straight out and when her foot touched the wall she uttered a soft cry. Tears ran down her face.

"There's a little trick to it," said the nurse. She made a sound that was not quite a laugh. "Let me."

Michael ignored her. The wheelchair resisted his trembling pressure. Oh goddam shit.

"Take me in to him," Kristin said.

"Better not," the nurse said, to Michael's relief.

If he could see himself, futilely trying to ambulate his wife on wheels, Michael thought, it would be funny. But hospitals never had mirrors. There was a discovery. In the place of undoings, where things came apart, your children changed to cadavers, you spun your wife in wheelies, no mirrors. The joke was on you but you did not have to watch yourself.

When they were in the room she said,"I fell carrying him. He was by the garden fence—I fell in the snow." He could picture her carrying Paul up from the garden, tripping, slipping, stumbling. He took her icy hand but she withdrew it. "He was so cold."

"Lie down," he said. "Can you?"

"No, it hurts."

He stood and rang for the nurse.

Kristin took up the Bible as though she were entranced and began to read aloud.

" 'Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge.' "

Closing his eyes, he tried to hold on to the words. Listening to her read in her mother's strange featureless tone he could imagine Luther's Bible the way her mother out on the plains must have heard it from her own parents. A psalm for fools in the snow. Really expecting nothing but cold and death in the shadow of those wings. Odin's raven.

" 'Until these calamities be overpast. I will cry unto God most high.' "

Michael sat listening, despising the leaden resignation of his wife's prayer, its acceptance, surrender. His impulse was flight.

" 'My soul is among lions,' " she read, " 'and I lie even among them that are set on fire.' "

His impulse was flight. He sat there burning until the nurse came in. For some reason, she looked merry, confidential.

"I think we turned a corner," she said. "Michael! Kristin! I think we turned a corner."

Then the doctor entered quietly and they got Kristin into bed and she went under the medication. Even unconscious her eyes were half open.

The doctor said you responded or you didn't and Paul had responded. His temperature was going up. He was coming up. He would even get his fingers and toes back and his ethical little Christian brain going, it appeared. The doctor looked so relieved.

"You can have a minute while we get the gurney. We've gotta get her X-rayed pronto because she's got a broken leg there."

"You can see Paul," the nurse said. "He's sleeping. Real sleep now."

The doctor laughed. "It's very exhausting to half freeze to death."

"It would be," Michael said.

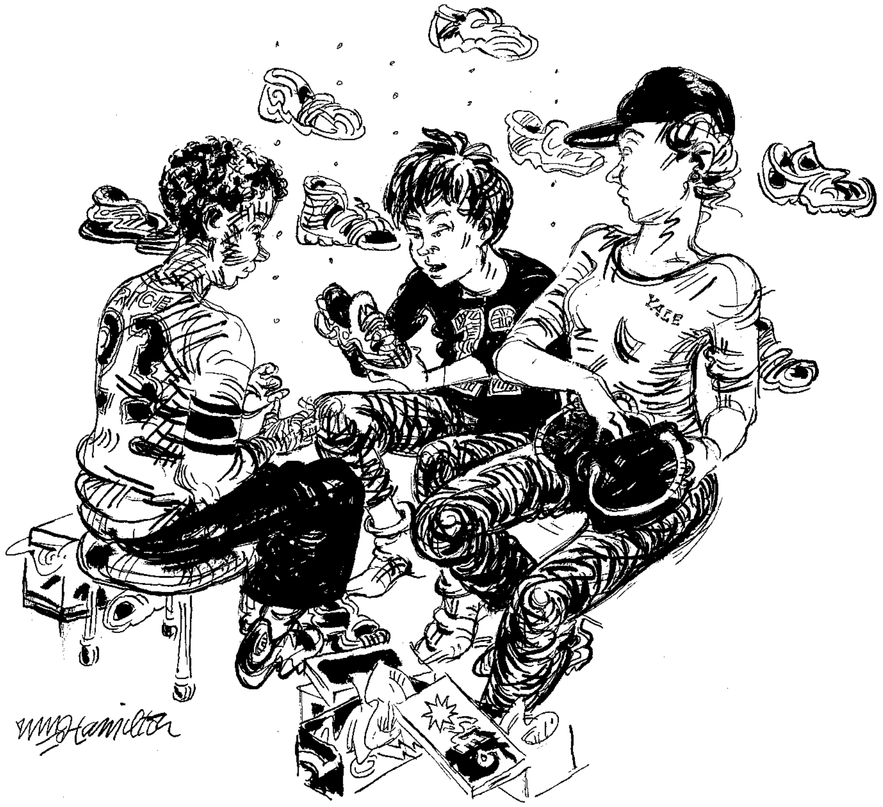
While they got the gurney, he looked into Kristin's half-open, tortured, long-lashed blue eyes and brushed the slightly graying black hair from them. With her long face and buck teeth she looked like the Christus on a Viking crucifix. Given her, he thought, given me, why didn't he die? Maybe he still will, Michael thought. The notion terrified him. He had stood up to make his escape when the orderlies came in to take Kristin away. Michael rubbed her cold hand.

The chapel was down at the end of the corridor. It had a kind of altar, stained-glass windows that opened on nothing, that were inlaid with clouds and doves and other fine inspirational things.

Michael had been afraid, for a while, that there was something out there, at the beginning and end of consciousness. An alpha and an omega to things. He had believed it for years on and off. And that night, he had felt certain, the fire would be visited on him. His boy would be taken away and he would know, know absolutely the power of the most high. Its horrible providence. Its mysteries, its hide-and-seek, and lessons, and redefined top-secret mercies to be understood through prayer and meditation. But only at really special moments of rhapsody and ecstasy and, O, wondrous clarity. Behold now behemoth. Who can draw Leviathan? Et cetera.

But now his son's life was saved. And the great thing had come of nothing, of absolutely nothing, out of a kaleidoscope, out of a Cracker Jack box. Every day its own flower, to every day its own stink and savor. Good old random singularity and you could exercise a proper revulsion for life's rank overabundance and everybody could have their rights and be happy.

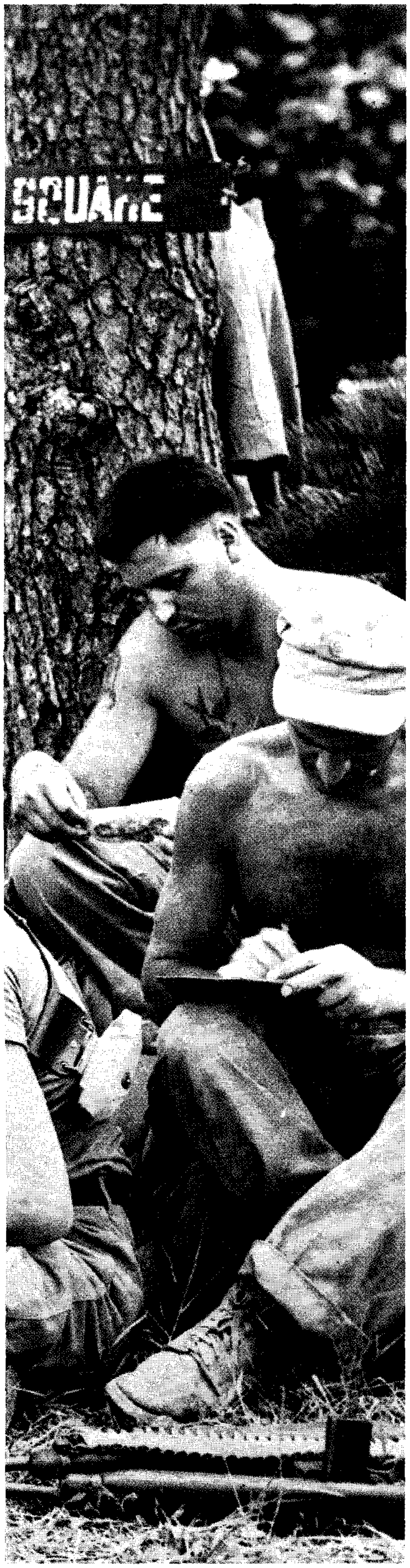
And he could be a serious person, a grownup at last and not worry over things that educated people had not troubled themselves with practically for centuries. Free at last and it didn't mean a thing and it would all be over, some things sooner than later. His marriage, for one, sealed in faith like the Sepulchral stone. Vain now. No one watched over us. Or rather we watched over each other. That was providence, what a relief. He turned his back on the inspirations of the chapel and went out to watch his lovely son survive another day. ♦



"Haven't you got anything a little more, like, ironic?"

BETTMAN/CORBIS

Marines in Okinawa, in July, 1945. Forty million Americans were in the wars of the twentieth century. Their letters are characterized by the



eed to get down on paper what they witnessed.

ANNALS OF HISTORY

AMERICAN SOLDIERS WRITE HOME

The stories of the twentieth century's wars.

These letters, drawn from a collection of more than fifteen thousand, represent the initial achievement of a new endeavor, the Legacy Project. It was conceived last year by Andrew Carroll, a thirty-year-old historian and editor who had made an important discovery: that, in local libraries and museums, family albums and attics, there are millions of unpublished letters by America's military—a foot soldiers' history of the nation when it was at war. And so Carroll set himself the task of collecting and cataloguing this enormous, unwieldy body of documents.

The letters of the Legacy Project date from the Revolutionary War. The edited selection that follows is from this century alone. In their plainspoken, colloquial, sometimes awkward style, these letters tell the story of the century in a way that is refreshingly direct and unmistakably American.

FIRST WORLD WAR

Semur, Côte-d'Or, France
February 18, 1919

DEAR OLD BUNKIE:

Now, don't go into epileptic fits when you read this. I know I haven't written you for some time. Too busy with Uncle Sam's affairs and am working to beat hell.

I guess you'd like to know about my experiences over here while the scrimmage was on so I'll give you a few yarns.

We were in the hills, up at Thiaucourt at first, although we did no actual fighting as we were in reserve. It was in the Argonne Forest where we got into it in earnest. It was here, old man, that I got my first Hun with the bayonet. This was the day before we took Grandpré and we had just broken through the enemy's first-line defenses.

We were pressing through a thicket when this big plug-ugly Hun suddenly loomed up in front and made a one-armed stab at me with his bayonet. A homelier guy I never saw before in all my life. He'd make two in size compared to Dad, and you know what a big man my old dad is.

Well, this bird did not catch me unawares. I thought I was going to have a pretty stiff one-sided fight on my hands, with the odds in his favor, but he was a cinch. Before I realized it, I'd parried his blow and had him through the throat. It was my first hand-to-hand fight. It was all over in a second—that is, for Jerry. He never made a squeak and went down like a log.

I know the first thing you'll ask when you see me: Was I afraid? Now, I am not going to stick my chest out and exclaim, "Like hell I was," or anything of the sort. Sure, I was afraid—as you and any other chap would be, too—but what I feared most was I would be yellow. If a fellow gets a yellow streak, and backs down, the other boys won't have anything to do with him. That's what I was afraid of—getting a yellow streak.

But I didn't. I was as plucky as any other doughboy and although I didn't get as much as a scratch, I had many a close call. Enough of them to make a fellow's hair turn white. I crouched for three hours one night up to my waist in water in a shell hole waiting for our barrage to lift. The water was like ice, and there were five dead Huns floating around in it, too. Not very pleasant, eh?

We finally cleared them out and opened up the way for an attack on Grandpré itself, but at a heavy cost. I lost a buddy in the last charge. We can't mention any names of the boys who were killed, so I'll have to postpone it until I get home, but he came from New Hampshire and a whiter fellow never lived. He was the only child too, old chap, and his parents certainly have my sympathy. I wrote a letter to them trying to make it as soft as I could. Well, he gave his all, and you can't expect a fellow to do more.

While we were sneaking about the

ruins of Grandpré, "mopping up," we came across a Prussian chap in a ruined building with a rifle. He was a sniper, and he was alive. During the bombardment the roof of the building had fallen through in such a way as to pin him by his feet and he couldn't get himself free. There was an opening big enough for him to crawl through, but he couldn't move. I'll explain when I see you as I can tell it better than I can write it. He begged us to help him, and although we had been cautioned against treachery, Dan, one of our fellows, put down his rifle and started to crawl through to free him. The moment he got his head and shoulder through the hole, this Hun hauls off and lets Dan have a charge right square in the face. Poor Dan never knew what happened. His face was unrecognizable. That Hun was the dirtiest skunk who ever lived. We were furious, and riddled that hole and didn't stop shooting until our magazines were empty. Dan was a husky boy who boasted of being a football player somewhere out in Tennessee. I've mentioned his name as Dan but that's not his name. I've just got it down so I can write my story out better.

Well, I was there to the finish, old man. I guess this will be all for just now, so with best regards and good wishes to you, Elmer, Mother Sutters, Pop, Mutt, and all the kyoodles, I close.

Your Old Friend and Comrade in Mischief,

DICKWITCH

P.S. Say you old slab of a lopsided tin-eared jackass, what's wrong with you anyhow? Got writer's cramp or what? Pick up a pen for the love of Pete and write to your old buddy in France.

SECOND WORLD WAR

August 29, 1941
San Diego, California

DEAR MOM:

This is the lousiest place in the world. The clothes they gave us are too big. I got my shots today and they hurt. The sergeant's crabby. Just because a boy forgot something when we were moving the man kicked him and made him run all the way over to the other camp and get it. We go to bed at nine and get up at five. Mom, tell them the truth about my age and get me out of here. I am getting so lonely I think I will die. We had to get all of our hair cut off but a half inch. Hurry, as soon as possible, if you can. Try to get me out by Sunday at least. We had to polish and wash windows last night at nine o'clock. Oh, Mom, if you only knew how I feel you would not wait to get me out. Bring me some clothes when you come to get me. Write me some because I have put some stamps in for air mail. You have to walk on your tiptoes so as not make too much noise. The sarge made that up. Tell everybody I said hello. How's Sandy?

Your son,
BILL

Private William L. Lynn, fifteen, was killed three years later in the Pacific.

December 17, 1941
Pearl Harbor, Hawaii

IZEE REDS [hunting companions]:

Just a note to tell you hams that we had a little disturbance out here a week ago Sunday and it was sumpin'.

I was resting peacefully in bed when I noticed rather more "practice fire" than I had heard before and then realized that it was strange to be practicing on Sunday morning. About that time Clara and the kids came home from church and their curiosity was aroused. Then I got the fatal word to report to the hospital immediately. I still was not certain what was going on until I came off the hill on my way to the hospital. Then I saw the smoke and the anti-aircraft shells exploding.

One Jap plane was down in flames at the hospital. I met the exec. at the door and he told me to go up and take charge of the surgery. I hurried up and the casualties were already pouring in. I did the first operation in this war if that is anything. I then spent the next seventy-two hours in four-hour shifts at the operating table. During my first shift we were under almost constant bombing and the anti-aircraft fire kept up a constant din. They didn't actually hit the hospital but one explosion was so close it blew all the windows out next to the room where I was operating. I thought my time had come. It was hell for a while. These poor devils were brought in all shot up and burned. Many of them hopeless. We gave them plenty of morphine and sent them out in the wards to die. The others we patched up as best we could. Some we opened their bellies and sewed up perforations in their bowels. It was all a nice party but personally I don't want to see any more like it.

You have read the official accounts given by the Secretary of the Navy. I note relief on the mainland that it was not as bad as feared. If the truth were known I don't think they would be so optimistic. Don't quote me but this is the real dope. We have just three battleships that can fight now. If you think these damn slant eyes didn't do a thorough job, guess again. They knew where they could hurt us most. They had all the information they needed even to the exact location of the most vital targets and as to our ship movements. Why do they soft-pedal things back there?

We are under strict military law. Blackout every night. Please do not broadcast the source of this information, as I am in a bad spot, I guess, if I'm caught sending this out. But you all should know. I hope this note gets through the route I have chosen. It certainly would not by the regular channels.

We wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. And Remember Pearl Harbor.

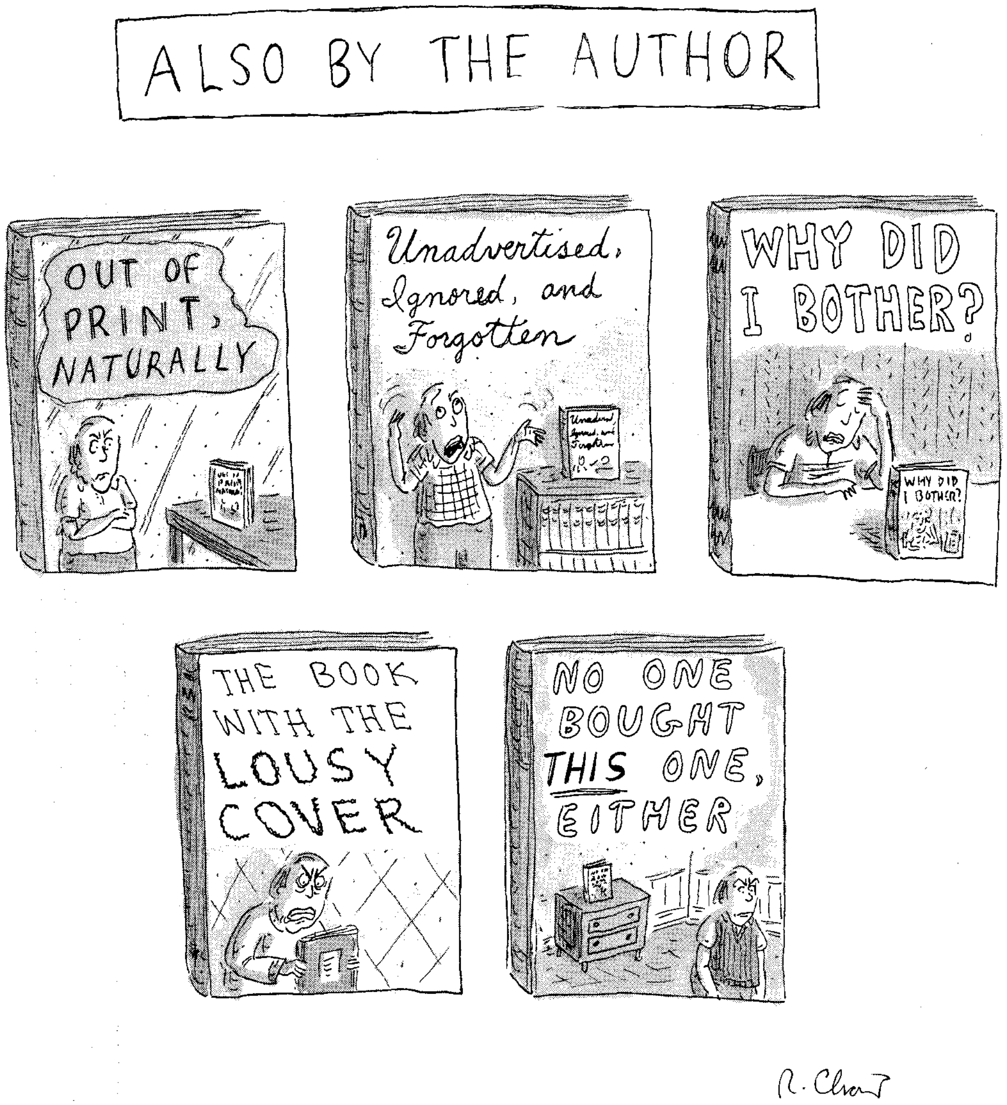
Dr. Paul Spangler, Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy Medical Corps.

July 19, 1944

DEAR MOTHER:

Saint-Lô fell on July 18th and we got to France on the morning of the nineteenth. While we waited for landing boats we looked at the beach. It had bomb craters all over. A house nearby was blown to bits and roofless. We then rode in trucks to the front. The buildings and houses were in ruins. We threw gum and cigarettes to the people and also cans of meat from our rations. In England, we were given all the cartons of cigarettes we could carry and plenty of candy. Also we were issued eighty rounds of .30-calibre ammunition but everyone was filling their pockets with extra clips. I don't blame them. I had about thirty-two extra rounds myself.

We finally started on our long march—eight miles. Imagine carrying seventy-five pounds of equipment eight miles under the hot sun. My buddy and I fell


ALSO BY THE AUTHOR
OUT OF PRINT, NATURALLY
Unadvertised, Ignored, and Forgotten
WHY DID I BOTHER?
THE BOOK WITH THE LOUSY COVER
NO ONE BOUGHT THIS ONE, EITHER
R. Chast

to the side of the road several times from being so tired. I couldn't stand having that rifle belt filled with amm. digging into my side. My buddy took my gun and carried it the rest of the way. Malcolm was a swell guy. He was always helping me out. He comes from Columbus, Ohio.

Our enemy was now at Périers, another French town. We unloaded at a point where we could see the artillery going off. Boy, were we scared. We were all jittery. Our commander gave us an order to march at port arms and at ten to fifteen paces apart. We passed a field that had some wrecked German 88s [cannons]. U.S. and English gliders were all over, wrecked, too. We saw dead cows by the hundreds—what a smell (whew). My buddy told me to look across the street. There were four dead Germans piled up. One was headless. Ugh, what a sight! Hands and legs all over. Their faces were all swelled up and maggots were coming out of their mouths.

We passed a medical station and looked in through the broken windows and doors and saw G.I.s piled up, dead. This scared us to death seeing our own dead. After that, we were very quiet. It was raining and we were all soaked and getting cold. The captain told us to dig our foxholes quick. I don't think anyone slept that night in their rain-filled foxholes. At least Malc and I didn't. The mosquitoes were awful. We took our wet field jackets and wrapped them around our faces to keep from being eaten up.

The next morning, the twentieth, was a big day. It was quiet except for snipers, until about eleven o'clock, when our artillery and the German artillery opened up. One shell landed twenty feet from us. At 5 P.M., our sergeant comes up to us and says he needs men for a combat patrol. We looked at each other and wondered which one of us would have to go but the sergeant said he needed us both. His name was Harman and he also comes from Detroit.

We headed towards the German lines. We tried crawling over the hedgerows but the snipers always saw us and fired a shot or two. We passed some ditches and in one there was a Browning automatic and dozens of grenades. The sergeant told me to see if the automatic was any good and to throw some grenades to the rest of the squad. We all turned a corner and saw five Germans walking towards us. The sergeant got three of them. Then the Germans opened up. There was then an unbelievable sight. Germans were coming from all over. It was a counterattack. Far away we could see more—hundreds of Germans speeding towards us on bicycles. We opened fire. Each 20-round magazine I loaded, I killed or wounded seven or eight Germans. I was nervous loading. I dropped a lot. The Germans were coming fast and they made plenty of noise. Our sergeant was shot through the head and died instantly. The rest of the squad, now under the command of Sergeant Durham, were all asking to withdraw, saying that hundreds of Germans were coming. There were Germans right across the street, and, as they came closer, we gave them the grenades, about twenty of them, throwing them over the hedgerow. We heard screaming and they then opened up with every weapon they had. We ran like mad dogs. My buddy was killed. He had about four holes through his back.

We kept running until we came to a hedgerow. This is where a machine gun got me, right in the ankle, breaking all the bones, and when I tried to take a few more steps, the ankle buckled up and I stepped on the broken part. It didn't hurt at first. It felt like an electric shock. Sergeant Durham picked me up and carefully put me on his back and carried me back. The medics were swell guys and worked fast. Sulfanilamide powder on the wound, morphine in the arm, a brace for the leg, and I didn't feel so bad. After hours of waiting, ambulances took us to an airport near Saint-Lô and we were loaded on C-54 transports. French civilians gathered around as we were being loaded and they all waved and gave us a lot of smiles. It was a nice ride across the Channel, my first plane ride. I am now eating my last meal in England. It's 5:30 A.M. and we are leaving for the States.

Your son,
Peter

Peter Essa, private first class.

August 31, 1944

Hello Mom and Dad:

Have had plenty of time to review the past two months of my life. [The D-Day invasion was June 6th.] In the following paragraphs shall try and explain my experiences. Of course a few of the events must wait until after this war, as censorship closes the door on many military problems.

We hit water from an assault boat and waded ashore. Didn't try running in water as this only uses up one's energy. Here for the first time my training was being put to use. (Never run in water as you can be carried along by waves much easier.) Touched solid ground and we all were on the move at a run. There was quite a bit of noise from the big guns being fired from ship. So didn't realize was being shot at until saw slugs leaving their calling cards on the sand. No time to stop and think, must get some protection. So covered ground at full speed, ending up behind a rising. Again my training was put to use. (Never hit the ground in the open when under fire.)

Now under cover of this high ground was safe for the time being. But somewhere in front was the enemy who knew how to soldier.

Looking around saw the ones who had gone before us, silent now, having left every battle behind. I was with two other soldiers, not knowing just what to do. This is the worst moment in a soldier's life. I knew the other two fellows were waiting on me as I was a sgt., the only one. Saw a lieutenant off to my right with a few men. Never was so glad to see a man in my life. Lay there listening to the firing up front.

The lieutenant hadn't moved, but in the next few minutes saw him looking around and getting a picture of what was before us. Then saw him yell to move up the hill. I yelled to men and we moved on up towards the front. This was my first time under enemy fire.

We dug a line of foxholes and placed guards along it for the whole night, each one of us taking a turn. The ones who weren't on guard could sleep but can say that not a man slept that first night.

At dark heard planes overhead very high. Had no way of knowing if ours or was Jerry himself. Hadn't long to wait. The planes droned out over our ships anchored along the coast. Within minutes there was a sight that will always be vivid in my mind. Up went more anti-aircraft fire than has ever been concentrated in one spot before. It was a protection circle, and the tracers in the sky formed a complete mass of red death to any plane that entered it. For us, it was beautiful, a kind of beauty only a soldier can understand, but for Jerry it was beyond imagining. Here was history in the making. Events taking place that kids will be reading about in future at school. Yes, I was proud that I had the honor of helping in my small way.

This much I can say—it takes teamwork between Infantry, Tanks, Artillery,

WINTER AT HERRING COVE

Years ago,
in the bottle-green light
of the cold January sea,

two seals
suddenly appeared together
in a single uplifting wave—

each in exactly the same relaxed position—
each, like a large, black comma,
upright and staring;

it was like a painting
done twice
and, twice, tenderly.

The wave hung, then it broke apart;
its lip was lightning;
its floor was the blow of sand

over which the seals rose and twirled and were gone.
Of all the reasons for gladness,
what could be foremost of this one,

that the mind can seize both the instant and the memory!
Now the seals are no more than the salt of the sea.
If they live, they're more distant than Greenland.

But here's the kingdom we call remembrance
with its thousand iron doors
through which I pass so easily,

switching on the old lights as I go—
while the dead wind rises and the old rapture rewinds,
the stiff waters once more begin to kick and flow.

—Mary Oliver

and Air Force. Football is a great game but it takes eleven players working together. One fellow moves under the protection of his team. Apply that to fighting over here and you have an idea of what I mean.

Am afraid I can't go beyond what have already told you. Events that happened the past few weeks am not allowed to write about. Can say I was hit but as to date, time, and place—well, as censorship doesn't permit it, why try to write about it?

Am doing fine here in England. Up and around now, even played a game of horseshoes today, so you all haven't a thing to worry about.

Love always,
Sonny

Staff Sergeant Eugene Lawton's last letter to his parents; he was killed four months later in Belgium.

February 6, 1945

Hello John, Ann, and all the little ones:

Greeting and salutations.

This will be the third invasion to my credit. I went through the North African, Sicilian, and present invasions without a scratch: what a lucky guy. I have also seen plenty of action and have just about had my fill. It's pretty tough to see your buddies getting knocked off, especially the ones who sweated it out with you from training days, but as the French say, "*C'est la guerre.*"

Thanks for wishing me the best for the New Year. While on the subject I'll give you a vague idea of the jolly New Year's Eve we had. Wined and dined on the Siegfried Line. Visited the Club Cologne on the Beautiful Rhine. Big 88 (heavy mortars) piece band and that famous singer Screaming Mimi (shells). All came—the mortar the merrier.

Well, what can I talk about now? As a last resort we can always talk about the weather. The weather has been very cold with plenty of snow—snow and more snow. As I look at the kids sledding and throwing snowballs, it brings back memories of the times I had when I was a kid. All us lads from the northern states remember those times well. Took out our Flexible Flyers and went belly-whopping down the hills. Made snowmen. Or packed the snow into hard, round balls that caught other kids in the head and melted down the backs of their necks. When our hands got red and our feet got cold we would call it a day. We would go indoors to a hot fire and put on dry socks and shoes and eat hot chow to take off the chill.

There's a lot of snow on the Western Front these days, and the country looks like a Christmas card. The trees are like old queens stooping under the weight of their ermine robes. The wires loop from pole to pole like tinsel on a Christmas tree, except where the weight of ice and snow has pulled them down and the signal repairmen are patching them. Snow lies smooth on the hillsides—it's beautiful.

But the Flexible Flyers have turned into tanks. The snowmen are Schutzstaffel. The snowballs are grenades. The wet stuff trickling down the back of necks is often blood. And when you're wet and numb with cold there's no place to go to. Nothing to look forward to. Nothing but snow. Cold, wet, beautiful snow.

With so many Nazis dying for *der Führer* there is a possibility that Hades is beginning to look like Times Square on New Year's Eve.

Sincerely,
Frank

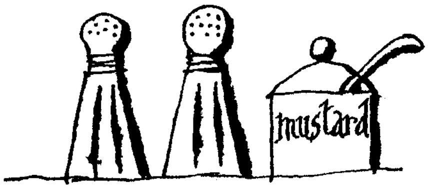
Frank Conwell, warrant officer.

April 16, 1945

Dearest Family:

The war has been moving so fast it makes you wonder where the catch is, and if there isn't some surprise they're going to spring. It is strange to be sitting in Germany—in the middle of a conquered country. I have to keep reminding myself of where I am, because, except for the large cities where you really see the damage of bombs and artillery, Germany doesn't look as conquered as France or Belgium. The country villages are all intact, the fields are being cultivated in a normal fashion (and the countryside is beautiful), and the people are quite well dressed. They look much better fed than the French.

But we are in a Nazi city now and for the first time I'm beginning to feel real hatred for the German people. It's in the air. Stories come back to us from men who have visited the concentration camp nearby. Hundreds of bodies of slave laborers were discovered, including three American airmen—some burned, some starved, all emaciated, stacked up like cordwood. The German mayor, or Bürgermeister, and his wife were taken out to see the place after the Americans took over. They went home and hanged themselves that night—whether from shame and remorse that they belonged to such a murderous race, or from fear that we might do the same to them, I don't know.



Our girls have wanted to go, too—one of those morbid things that attract and fascinate even though they're revolting. But our Army bosses won't let us. Their refusal made our girls awfully mad, and they couldn't see that the restriction was intended as a compliment. The Army felt that it would be unbecoming for us to view a stack of starved, nude male bodies. While at first I thought I wanted to go, too, now I'm glad they wouldn't let us—and pleased that our men thought that much of us. It is just little things like that which set us apart from the rest of the world and make me glad I'm an American. Maybe we aren't very good warriors, but we're certainly a better people.

Love,
Angie

Angela Petesch, Red Cross nurse.

September 8, 1945

Dear Folks:

We left the States December 14, 1943, on a luxury liner, the Lurline, and arrived in Honolulu on the twentieth. On May 31st, we got on transports at Pearl Harbor. On June 16th we dropped anchor off the coast of Saipan. As we drew close we saw that the enemy landing barges were burning, and that live and dead Japs were floating in the water. About seventy-five yards from shore our barges grounded, and we waded shoulder-deep to land. Just as we set foot on the beach, the Japs opened up with rifles, machine guns, and mortars, and we lay in the water on the beach the rest of the night, waves washing over us continually. At four-thirty next morning we moved to the front lines, to relieve the Marine sector. That started our twenty-three straight days on the lines. Believe it or not, I went to sleep in no man's land for forty-five minutes, while boys were being killed right and left. Mortar shells lit on their heads, and this really did something to all of us. Some boys were jumping into the sea, when their faces were blown away. Two of us carried one boy back with us, and our aid man gave him plasma all night, but he died next morning. He had his jaw, tongue, and nose blown away. This is a horrible thing to write about, but people should understand what war means: maybe then they won't start another so soon.

After Saipan, the New Hebrides was heaven. A swell camp, with long rows of palms. We rested two weeks, then I got malaria. I did absolutely nothing and slowly got back my health. I had a Jeep to go places, and had plenty of fun. Went to the beach club every day, for ice cream and cokes. Meantime the boys were training for Okinawa. I missed out on all that training, being in Malaria Central.

On March 19th we left New Hebrides, and landed April 8th, on Okinawa, and moved inland and then up to the front lines. Was there ten days. The artillery was terrific. Shells hit and buried you, or blew you out of your foxhole. The Catholic chaplain was killed as he was blessing foxholes. A shell cut him in half at the waist. The Japs stacked lots of Americans in a big pile, poured gas on them, and touched a match. After plenty of casualties we broke the Western flank of the little Siegfried Line and were relieved by the Marines. That night, the Japs attacked and drove our full-strength company back five hundred yards. We were down to a handful. I had four men in my squad at the finish.

It has been a long time to be over here. Is it any wonder we were so excited when the news came? I guess I cried and laughed at the same time. I want to get home to see all of you.

Your loving son,
DICK

Richard King, an infantryman who was awarded the Silver Star.

KOREAN WAR

September 18, 1953

MY DEAR MR. WHEELER:

I'm taking this opportunity to write you concerning your son who was my close friend and companion through some of life's darkest experiences.

John and I were captured on the same date. I first met your son, Sgt. John N. Wheeler, at a collecting point for P.O.W.s. We were kept there for two days and then began the long trek back and forth along the enemy's rear. The enemy was using us to instill courage in their own fighters by showing their men that Americans are just flesh and blood after all and can be killed and captured. The food was terrible: a handful of bug dust or a small bowl of rice or one of sorghum. We got this twice a day, and water was available only when we were marched across a mountain stream or by rice paddies. Disease and filth were the rule and we were not allowed the facilities of cleanliness. We were covered with body lice and other parasites. It was not long before men began to drop out and were not heard from again. On June 13th we arrived at a rest stop. It was here that your son and I were separated from the main body of P.O.W.s. I had a few good years of college and your son spoke very good English, too. I believe that this is why they took us away. We were taken to a place so far back in the mountains that there was not a road or even a cart trail, only a narrow footpath and a few Korean mud houses. They kept us there and used us to practice their English. All the Chinese in the vicinity came to this HQ at one time or another and talked to us and asked thousands of questions concerning our families, our homes, America, our lives in the U.S. Army. John and I were all alone with about two hundred Chinks. Our other duty was to make all the supply runs (approximately fifteen miles one way) to bring rice and sorghum for everyone to eat. Our combat boots soon wore out and fell to pieces from the rough rocks and stones. John wore a size-12 combat boot and when the Chinese gave us their rubber tennis shoes they had none large enough to fit him. I wear a size-8 combat shoe and they did have tennis shoes that I could wear. Then in July we were hauling logs on our backs and digging bunkers. We were both very weak. I weighed less than a hundred pounds and John probably didn't weigh more than a hundred and fifteen. They said no work, no eat. During these heavy labors John contracted a skin disease on his hands, his nose, and his ears, which

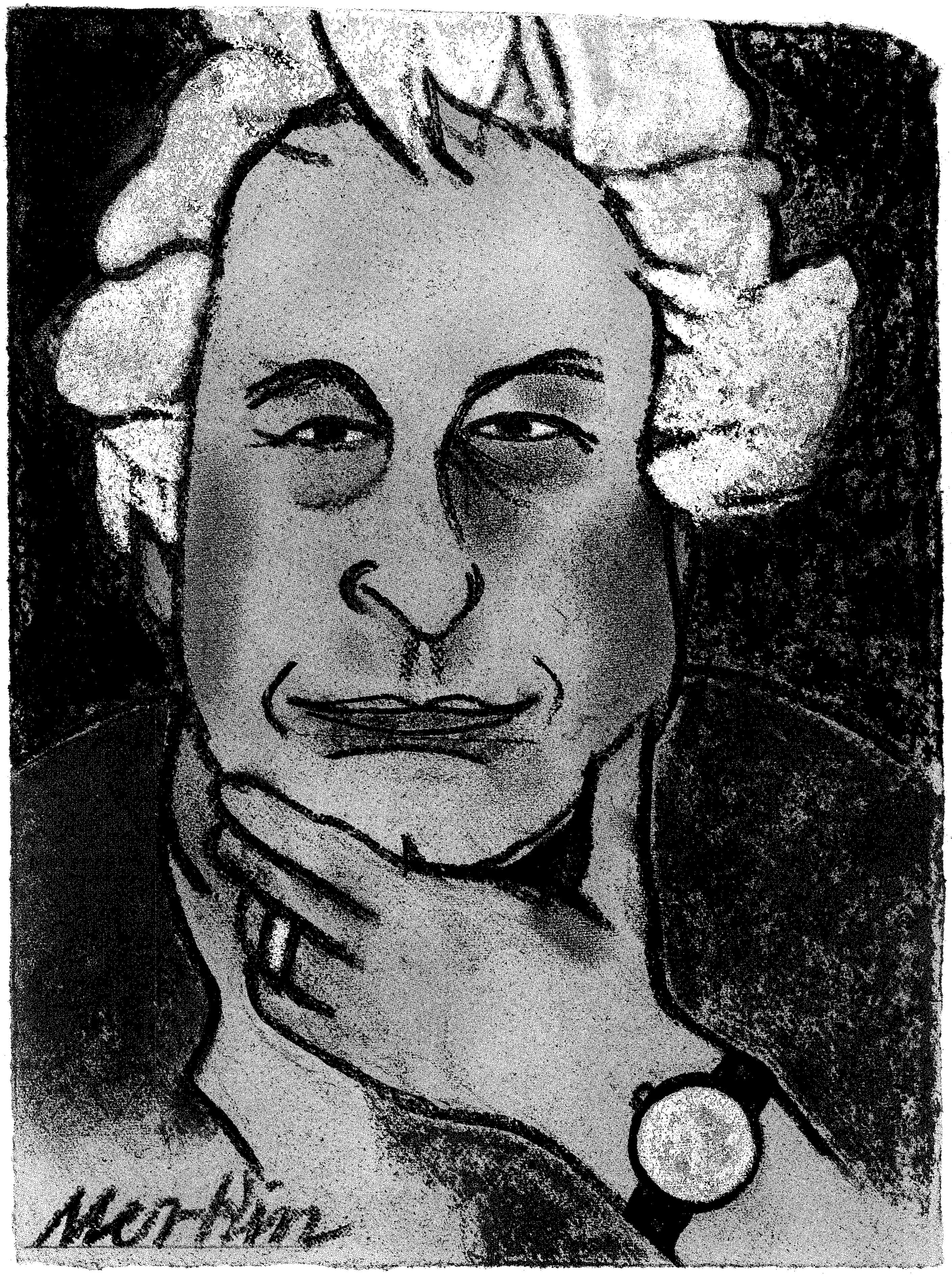
POSTSCRIPT

THE OTHER HELLER

THE obituaries marking the death of Joseph Heller last week rightly spent acres of space on his masterpiece, "Catch-22," but few of them noted with any emphasis that he was the author of another extraordinary book, "Something Happened." After publishing "Catch-22," in 1961, and after absorbing the blows of dismissive reviews and (initially) modest sales, Heller wasn't at all sure that he would ever write another novel. He had a wife and two small children. He spent his days writing advertising and promotional copy. And he had no ideas for another book. One night, Heller sat out on the deck of a house on Fire Island, terribly worried. But then that magical thing happened. Just as he had "received" the opening lines of "Catch-22" while lying in bed in a West Side apartment ("It was love at first sight . . ."), new lines came to him: "In the office in which I work, there are five people of whom I am afraid. Each of these five people is afraid of four people (excluding overlaps)."

Heller had read Céline's "Journey to the End of the Night" to help fuel the writing of "Catch-22." For the new book, he leaned on the Beckett trilogy "Molloy," "Malone Dies," and "The Unnameable." But the real process of writing it was far more complicated—something Heller later talked about as an ineffable combination of listening and experience, followed by years of intense labor. "Something Happened," which was published in 1974, is far darker than the dark comedy of "Catch-22." It is narrated by Bob Slocum, a man in his forties who has lost interest, who sees no way out of his responsibilities, his job, his loveless life. In later years, Heller's public image lightened, partly because he broadened the comedy in his writing, and partly because he didn't take himself terribly seriously. (His best interview was conducted by his friend Mel Brooks.) And yet Heller left behind something unmistakably serious and permanent: two novels—one of war, one domestic—unlike any others. He even did what poets do. He added words to the language: Catch-22.—DAVID REMNICK

RICHARD MERKIN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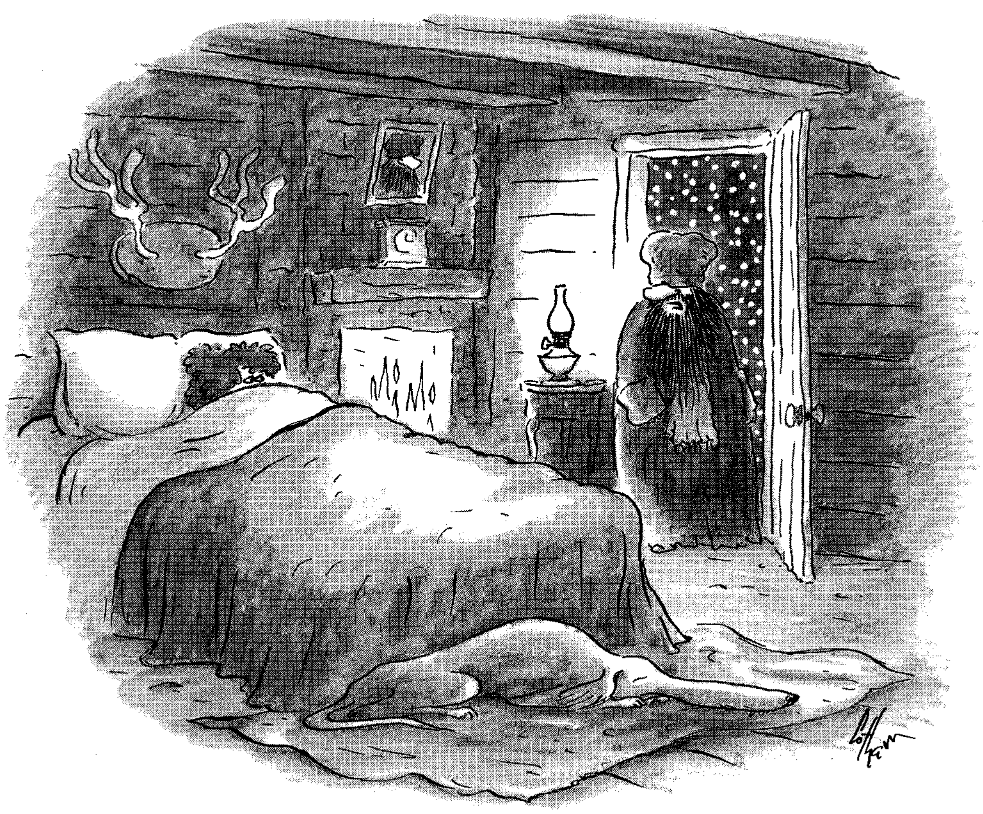


"I'd better bring in my plants."

• •

became a real dark brown—a yellow matter formed under the skin and broke through and would need to be drained. They made us eat alone because they were afraid they would catch John's disease. On August 6, 1951, the Chinese told us that they were going to take John to a place where there were many American soldiers and where there were good Chinese doctors and medicine. John and I were very close friends after being through so much together. We had often talked of our families and friends and I felt that I knew you and John's sister. John was the finest friend and buddy a fellow could ever have.

Just as John left me he presented me with his most treasured belonging. John gave me his Bible because he felt I would need it being alone with the Chinese with no one to talk to and no one to remember all the things we so dearly loved about our wonderful United States. I was deeply moved and as John walked away there were tears in my eyes and after he had disappeared over the mountain I let my feelings go and had a little cry. I have never had a truer friend or known a better man. It was like losing a lifelong companion.

On November 11, 1951, I was also taken to the same place John had been sent to. We called it the mining camp. Most of the men seemed to remember a Wheeler arriving and going straight to the hospital, where he died shortly after that. They told me that the hospital was actually a death house and only one man out of the hundred sent there ever returned.

I still have John's Bible and I would like to send it to you as a dear remembrance. I have kept it in excellent condition, always keeping it wrapped to protect it from the elements.

Most sincerely,
SFC GORDON L. MADSON

November, 1956

TO THE BEST WIFE A MAN EVER HAD:

Honey, I am writing to say a few things that I might leave unsaid if I should depart this world unexpected-like. In this flying business you never can tell when you might all of a sudden get unlucky and wake up dead. I suppose this shows me up for being an old sentimental fool, but I thought if I could make sure you know how I feel about such things it might be a comfort.

First of all, let's face one fact—everybody ends up dead. Think of all the infants and children and people who had the misfortune to die before they got much of anything out of life, and then think of all I got out of it.

Even if I should die the day after writing this, I am still one of the luckiest people who ever lived, and you know it. When you come right down to it, I've done just about everything I've wanted to do and seen about everything I've wanted to see. Sure, I'd like to stick around while the boys are growing up, and have fun with you once they've done that and when we have time again. But you and I agree so closely on how to raise a family, I'm sure that the boys are going to be all right. And I've had enough fun with you to last a lifetime.

Don't let the memories of me keep you from marrying again, if you run across somebody fit to be your husband, which would be hard to find, I know. But you're much too wonderful a wife and mother to waste yourself as a widow. Life is for the living. (That's not original, I'm sure.)

So get that smile back on your face, put on some lipstick and a new dress, and show me what you can do toward building a new life. Just remember me once in a while—not too often, or it'll cramp your style—and as long as I'm remembered, I'm not really dead. I'll still be living in John, Bill, and Al, and Dan, bless their hearts. That's what they mean by eternity, I think.

My love as always,
JACK

Jack Sweeney, stationed in Bermuda, died a few weeks later when his plane crashed in the Atlantic.

VIETNAM WAR

September 6, 1968

DEAR MIKE:

I now have a war story to tell. On bunker guard two weeks ago, I received ten minutes of sniper fire. You should have seen little old me peering over the sandbags, trying to see who was shooting. No one was shot, and they wouldn't let us fire back. Thank goodness. I don't blame whoever it was: if there were invaders in my country, I'd shoot at them, too. What in the hell am I doing here?

That same night, the Bien Hoa air base was being mortared when, all of a sudden, a large red ball of fire soared into the sky. It expanded, and then almost instanteously became a mushroom cloud. You can imagine how scared we were; we thought the ammo dump had been hit. (We later found out that a V.C. rocket hit a bomb storage area.) And then, from that red mushroom, pink shock waves started vibrating, and we could see shock waves heading for us. We gripped the walls, but the blast almost tore us all loose. Every second I was expecting to die. I regretted everything I had done for the U.S.A. God, I hate the Army and the country it represents. Look at the infamous job I am forced to do. Americans are ruthless and violent: I hate 'em.

Otherwise the past week has been one continuous high. Every night I "lose" myself. The first few times, I felt nothing, just as you said. Now I fear I've become a connoisseur. And that's not all: two weeks ago, I went to Saigon and smoked opium. The setting was great. A dark room with an old withered man lying on a table (his head resting on a wooden block), a lamp with a small red flame, and a Vietnamese woman softly singing some weird song. The old man cooked the opium in a long wooden pipe over a flame. I lay beside him and rested my head on the wooden block and quickly inhaled the smoke coming from the pipe as he held it over the flame. Then we had a little pot. The greatest feeling. God, I don't know how I made it back here to Bien Hoa. The guy I was with said I looked as if I were in a trance.

Write me soon,
Rick

Richard Baltzegar, Army Specialist 4.

[Undated]

Dear Carol:

The following is my recollection of your brother's death.

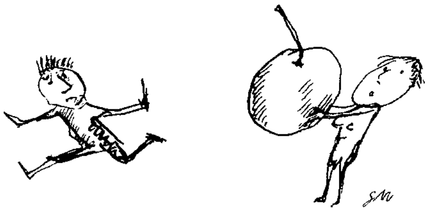
On Thursday, June 12th, our company was walking down a mountain path, when someone opened fire on our point man with a .51-calibre machine gun. This is a very heavy gun that shoots bullets which are roughly a half inch in diameter and about two inches long. The point man was a medic from another platoon. He died instantly. (A platoon has about thirty men; there are four platoons in a company.) I don't know why a medic was walking point; medics are considered too valuable to risk losing. The point man is always the first to die. At the time I was also a point man.

We pulled back and tried to go around. We were in heavy jungle, and you can see only about three feet into heavy jungle, and we then ran into more bunkers. (A bunker is a hole in the ground with a dirt-and-log roof to protect the inhabitants from mortar fire and a small opening to shoot from.)

Meanwhile, our captain had asked for more artillery—more mortars, F-4 Phantom fighter planes, and helicopter gunships with rockets and miniguns. Afterwards, our captain was sure that everyone in the bunkers was dead, so he called in some news reporters to record his moment of triumph. We waited twenty or thirty minutes until a helicopter could fly out the reporters. Unfortunately, no one told the N.V.A. (the North Vietnamese Army) that they were dead, and they used this time to regroup. When we advanced again, they opened fire.

We assaulted the bunkers again and again. We lost men each time. The lead platoon was wiped out. When it ran out of men, my platoon was brought up to take over. Two of our four squad leaders were wounded—one was wounded a second time, when he was shot through the neck as he boarded the helicopter. I heard that he died, but that seems to have been wrong. His name is not on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, so he maybe lived. He never returned to our unit. (If someone did not return, he was either severely wounded or dead.)

It was very late when the last assault failed. (We had been fighting since 9 or 10 A.M.) Our company pulled back, and formed a perimeter around a side of the mountain. Nobody slept.



During the night we could hear large numbers of N.V.A. soldiers leaving. They had to leave by the same path we came in by. As they went down the mountain, they walked past our position. We were hopelessly outnumbered, so didn't dare open fire. At the time we were just glad to believe they were going.

On the next day, our platoon was the lead. We had just started up the side of the mountain when we discovered that not everyone had left the camp. Someone in a bunker opened up on our point man, and all of us dropped to the ground. As we were crouching, our radio-telephone operator (the R.T.O.) happened to stroll down the path from the direction of the firing machine gun, stopping just above me. Bullets were flying over our heads. The R.T.O. dropped his radio and casually said to the lieutenant, "You'll have to find another R.T.O. I've been shot." He then continued strolling down the path. He must have been severely wounded, because he never returned. I was impressed by his casual approach, and hoped that I would act that well when I was wounded. (I didn't.)

The classic approach to suppressing fire from a bunker is to pull back, spread out in a semicircle, and then distract the men inside by firing on them from one direction. When the men in the bunker start firing in that direction, one of our people on the other side rises up and tosses a grenade into the bunker's port. Steve was the man on that other side.

He was less than twenty yards from the bunker. He was trying to toss a one-pound grenade into a small opening about six inches high. The task is especially difficult because the man inside is doing his best to kill you. Steve, evidently, stood up too high, or there was more than one soldier in the bunker, or someone in a second bunker opened fire. In any case, Steve was seen and shot with an AK-47. He was shot several times in the chest, and once in the right temple. He was not wearing a helmet. Steve dropped to the ground immediately, lost consciousness, and was dragged back to the rest of us. The platoon medic, crouching next to me, started to work on Steve. Although he worked on Steve until he died, the medic could do little more than make him comfortable. Steve had two fatal wounds: a bullet in his brains, and several bullets in his chest.

A battle is very noisy. The machine guns, rifles, grenades, and mortars all make a great deal of noise. The F-4 fighter aircraft were also flying above us, dropping bombs, and attack helicopters were firing rockets. In addition, there were screams from the wounded. The noise builds up to a peak, subsides, and then builds up again. There was too much noise to hear Steve during the peak. But during the lulls I could hear him laboring to breathe. With each lull, he was having increasingly more difficulty breathing. The wounds in his chest had punctured both lungs, which were filling with blood. There was nothing the medic could do when both lungs were punctured.

I believe Steve died when his lungs filled up with blood, and he could no longer breathe. A few minutes later our lieutenant told me to carry Steve down to the medevac area, and leave him there. I did so and never saw him again. After our wounded were evacuated, a medevac helicopter would have brought Steve's body back. Then his body would have been sent back to you in the U.S.

One of the wounded was a photographer who had arrived the previous day to record our captain's triumph. He had been forced to spend the night with us because it was too dark for a helicopter to fly him back to our base. The next day, he had been shot in the leg when he stood up to take a picture just as Steve was attacking the bunker. The photographer was holding his camera to his face when it, too, was hit by a bullet. The camera stopped the bullet, but, rammed against his face, it left him with a bloody nose. He was carried out, but refused to leave until someone went up and retrieved his camera. He had dropped it when he was shot. Someone risked his life retrieving this camera. (I was not in command of any men then, but, if I had been, that photographer would still be on that mountainside waiting for his camera.)

The men with Steve had been unable to destroy the bunker. Our captain finally ordered us to pull back, and called in more F-4 fighter aircraft. The F-4s strafed the area with cannon fire and dropped napalm. Napalm is a jellied gasoline that has the consistency of watery jello, and when it lands it splashes over a large area, where everything touched by it catches fire and burns. It is perfect for destroying bunkers, because it doesn't need to be delivered with pinpoint accuracy and because it sucks oxygen from underground bunkers, suffocating those hiding there.

We were closer to the napalm than we should have been—so close that we could look up and watch the cloud as it formed over us. Bits of the burning napalm fell out of the cloud and landed on our backs and heads. It looks and feels like molten plastic when it lands on your skin. I had a blob drip on the back of my arm.

After the strafing and the napalm, our platoon leader wanted to see if any N.V.A. still was alive and announced that the next assault would be led by a two-man machine-gun team. He turned to me and said, "Professor, you're going to be the assistant machine gunner." (Everyone is known by their nickname. Mine was the Professor.) I was terrified; everyone who had led the earlier assaults had died or been badly wounded. I knew I was going to die.

After all the napalm, there were no more trees, scrubs, or undergrowth. We advanced slowly, looking for the bunkers. They weren't there anymore. We did see bits of human bodies, but everything was destroyed, and everyone was dead. The machine gunner and I continued walking. We could not believe that no one was going to fire on us.

We marched off the mountain several days later, and no American probably set foot on it again. The U.S. philosophy was that we were not fighting for territory, but only to harass and kill the enemy. Even so, a lot of blood was paid winning a mountain that we then walked away from. The area is so remote it's possible that no Vietnamese has set foot on that mountain since.

For me, Vietnam was an education in death. I learned to kill men, walk into what I had expected would be my death, and watch men die. I now am at an age where colleagues are beginning to die. I have found colleagues who fear death because they have never had any experience with it, and don't know how to face it. (Only about one per cent of the male baby boomers saw combat in Vietnam.) Vietnam has given me an advantage in that I have faced my death.

Sincerely,
BOB LEAHY

Leahy was an infantry point man and, later, a squad leader.

GULF WAR

March 8, 1991

DEAR Y'ALL,

I'm now back in Saudi Arabia. I'm in a maintenance collection point about twenty miles from King Fahd Military City. I don't know if King Fahd Military City is on the map, but if it is you know where I am. I sure don't. The rest of my unit is still in north Kuwait. My tank developed an oil leak partway through the fighting, and finally quit two days ago.

We passed Kuwait City on the coast road in the middle of the night. I can't describe it. I mean the scene on the highway. We all just looked at it in the moonlight as we drove through the now silent carnage, saying, "God damn, God damn . . ." I talked to a lieutenant today who saw it during the day, and he gave an interesting description of the dead who littered the highway. He picked up a beret out of a car; a dead Iraqi was in the back seat, eyes wide open, frozen in a silent scream.

I still think of the guy I shot the day before we attacked. If I hadn't done it, he could have been in an enemy prisoner-of-war camp right now, waiting to go home, just like me. He probably would have surrendered along with the others, just one day later.

I haven't said much about what I've done during the ground war. I started writing Marianne about it, but it didn't come out right. We didn't do much shooting, though we (my tank) expended more ammo than any of the others in my platoon. We never shot another tank or vehicle, except one suspect tank, which, once the dust had settled, turned out to be an already dead heavy truck. We shot up some trenches and bunkers, mostly empty, but you never really knew. We ran over some anti-personnel mines and cluster bombs here and there, received some artillery off to our flank once. I missed an anti-tank mine which was about two feet on the right side, as we were coming round a dune, and, given our speed, would have probably gone off under my gunner and me.

It never seemed like a war. More like a field problem. Even when stuff was burning all around you. It was a curiosity. I just can't describe it.

Like one time [tank number] 21 was right next to me, and we were on the move, and he ran over a mine with his left track. It exploded and sent shit flying past me. I was up out of my hatch, and the first thing that came to mind was, Can I get to my camera before the smoke clears? I didn't even think to duck.

When we were breaching the main Iraqi defense line, an idiot popped up with an AK-47 from a trench and started firing. Mine was the first to return fire, and he didn't pop back up. Although the muzzle flash was pointing at us, you just don't think of it as someone shooting at you. Just a target and you engage it, like on a range.

Right after, as I was rejoining the platoon, some incoming artillery rounds landed three or four hundred yards from us and my only thought was that it hadn't been a very good shot. The second volley never came, so I figured our counter-battery must have had better aim.

Can you understand what I'm saying? I think I would have had to have gotten hit for it to seem different. I guess I've played it so much for the last ten years that it just didn't seem much different from the training. I've had field problems that were tougher. It wasn't even long enough to seem like a war. The waiting and worrying before we did it were worse than doing it.

I sometimes pictured the split second of being hit: the impact ripping my cupola from the turret and my body collapsing onto my gunner's back, and the tears back home. The image I have of the two of you sitting in front of the TV, afraid that I'm already dead, has choked me up and brought tears to my eyes. Even now as I write this I'm hoping that Marianne isn't still waiting for the "we're sorry" team to come knock at the door. I wish I could get to a phone to relieve the pain.

It's only been the last couple of days that I've come to realize the horror that has taken place here. It's not a personal feeling of horror, but more an overall picture of horror. And I think it's taken so long because with only a small number of exceptions, on our part, the horrors were almost entirely theirs.

You don't know what it's like to hold an M-16 up to a man's back and make him clear out a trench, and then discover a few pieces of rock-hard bread, blue and green with mold, break pieces off, and eat them. Or to realize you came a few feet from crushing live men who you thought were dead, and only saw them at the last moment because they were too afraid to stand up.

What was it like for those who were part of the carnage which we witnessed—the silent aftermath on that highway? I don't know if I'm really explaining the significance of the things I've been through or leaving you wondering what the hell I'm trying to get across.

The news said that rebels had come to our lines asking us to join them. Of course we couldn't. But we've made a mistake and not finished this the way it should have been ended. There is now a weakness in my heart for the people of Iraq. It may appear to most of us over here and to you back home that we've done our job, but we've screwed up and didn't finish it. He's still alive, and unless somehow the rebels finish what we've started, we may be back.

I guess I'm finally starting to feel like I've fought in a war.

This is what I expected it to be like in the first place before I came over here. It just took a while for it to sink in.

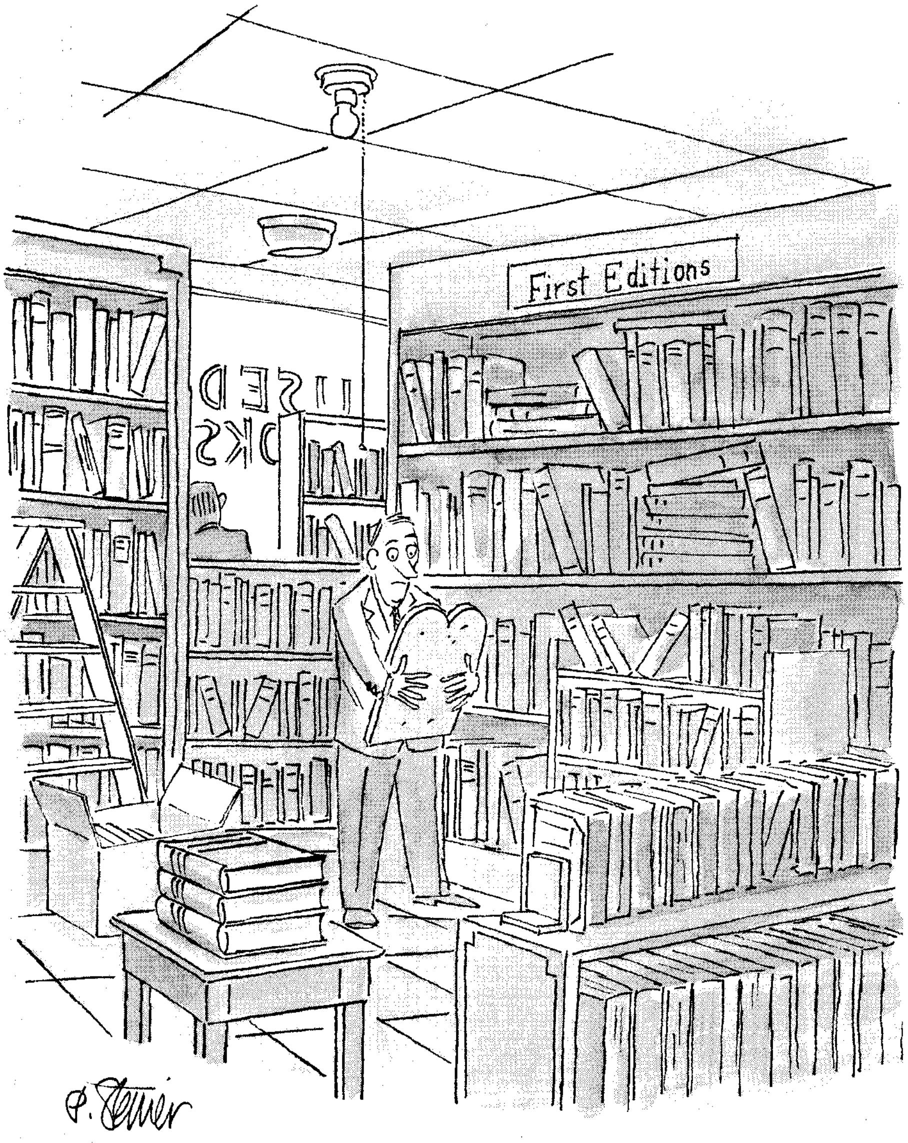
I'll be home soon.

Love,
DANIEL

P.S. I hope you're saving all my letters.

Daniel Welch, staff sergeant. ♦

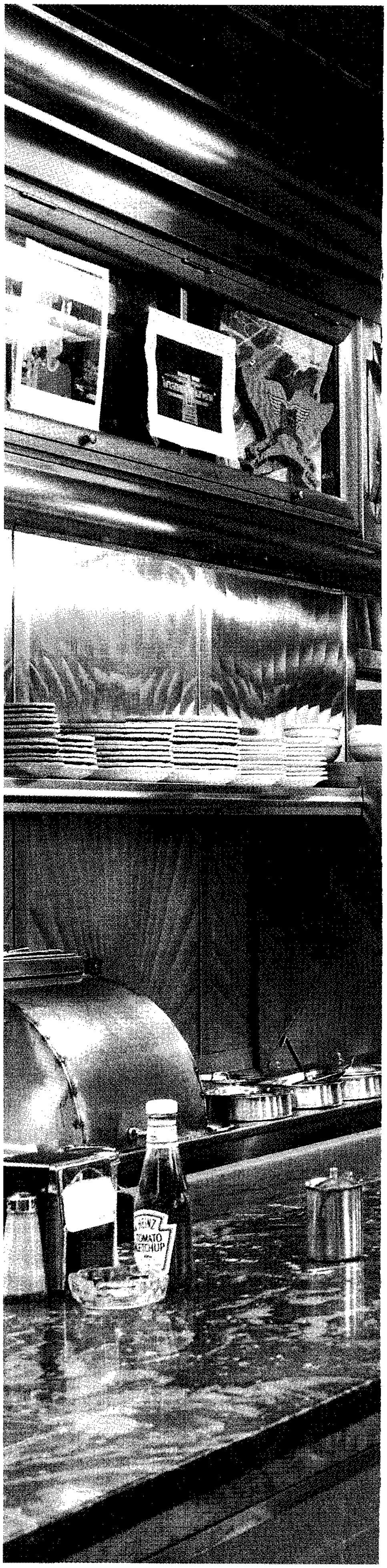
Copies of letters from any of America's wars can be sent to Andrew Carroll, the Legacy Project, P.O. Box 53250, Washington, D.C., 20009.



FICTION

THE PANCAKE SUPPER

BY DONALD ANTRIM



THE pancake suppers were my idea. The plan was, as I imagined it, innocent enough: respectful, unceremonious gatherings, one in early spring a few days before Easter, another sometime after the Wicker Beaver Festival in late October, all the teaching analysts coming together as friends, drinking limitless coffee refills, sharing opinions and impressions of the various candidates at the institute, of crises or patients' breakthroughs in our private practices, of new ideas relating to the seemingly everlasting task of reconciling classical metapsychology to our particular branch of Self/Other Friction Theory. It was my view that the mood at these pancake affairs should be kept light, and I therefore selected, instead of that new, expensive breakfast restaurant on Woodrow Avenue—Jane had been raving about the food, but I had never set foot inside, for reasons that may be immaterial within the context of the present discussion—the more modest, open-all-night Pancake House & Bar, on Eureka Drive, way out past the book factory, down the perilously steep hill leading to our famous covered bridge and, beyond the bridge, the overgrown, abandoned airfield.

It is true that this meant a long drive for my colleagues who live on the north side. An occasional trip through the city's neglected districts is worth their time and trouble. The Krakower Institute, like any privileged organization, has significant responsibilities toward the community, and I can't help feeling that, despite our peer-counselling program for teen-age girls, we do not accomplish enough. That said, allow me to report that our first-ever analysts' pancake party was a monumental success.

It was, I recall, a gorgeous evening, one of those ideal early-April nights, the stars already apparent in a sky falling from blue to black, the night air brisk with smells of trash fires smoldering in back-yard incinerators. You could hear songbirds gathered in the flowering trees that border the restaurant parking lot and, in the distance, the high, whining buzz made by handmade wood-and-paper airplanes that circled above their pilots, local hobbyists standing on the old airport's broken tarmac, clutching radio consoles.

I love our medium-sized city, with its Revolutionary War history and its easygoing ways, its minor-league sports teams, and its modest skyline visible in the distance from my comfortable booth at the Pancake House. Looking north through partly curtained windows, I could see the pyramidal tower of the new municipal hospital, shining brightly, blindingly orange in the setting sun's remaining light.

Beyond the hospital, College Hill rose steeply from downtown and our popular riverfront market district. Lights were on inside homes dotting the Hill's expansive, rolling lawns, which had been hacked out of the region's last native forest back in the early nineteenth century. Kernberg College began, interestingly, as a music academy for orphans; and it is the old music hall, housed in its bizarre, turreted, allegedly haunted mansion atop College Hill, that best captures the benevolent spirit—at least, this seemed true to me that night, looking out at everything from the Pancake House—of our brilliant, glowing city.

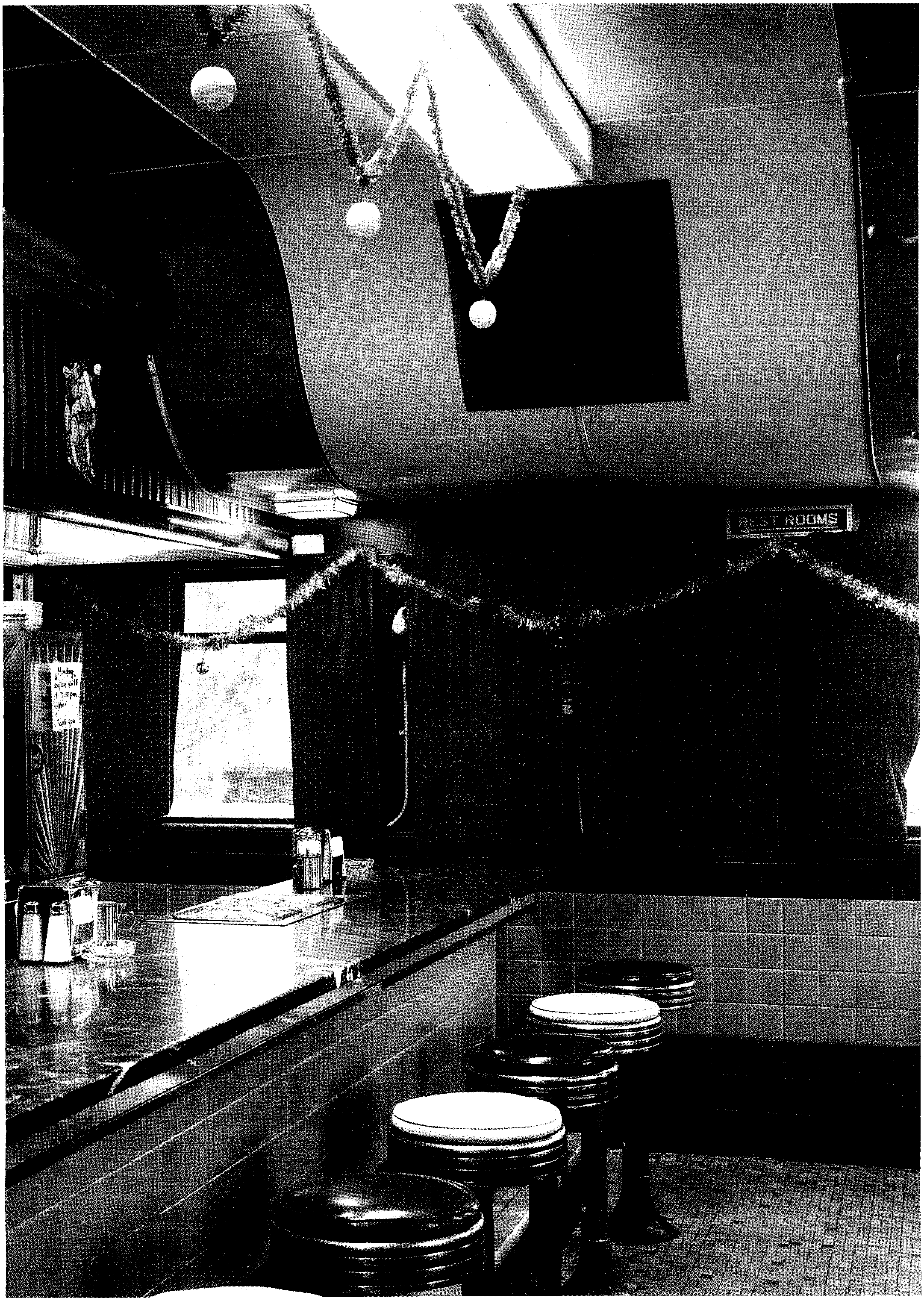
"Leave it to you to choose this place for dinner, Thomas."

The speaker was Manuel Escobar, the renowned Kleinian. He sat across from me, in the booth by the window, and I explained to him, "Breakfast foods, except for cereals that contain inordinate amounts of sugar, have, in my experience, a comforting, antidepressant quality."

"I suppose that is true if you are an American," Escobar said, looking around the room, then waving impatiently to our beautiful waitress.

"Don't stare."

"I'm not staring, Thomas. I find adolescent girls enchanting, though not compelling. I am happy with Conchita."



JEFF BROUWS, "DINER IN DECEMBER" (1990)/ROBERT MANN GALLERY

Then the waitress was beside our table, and Escobar, his eyelids lowered, said, "Hello, I am Escobar, and this is my friend Thomas."

"Pleased to meet you, welcome to the Pancake House & Bar, I'll be your waitress."

"It's nice to be here," I said. Why was I talking? My voice was all wrong, and I felt ridiculous.

Manuel, however—as always so absurdly comfortable with himself, so shamelessly direct in manner—asked, in his coarse, Mediterranean voice, "Tell me, what may we call you?"

"How about Rebecca?"

"Rebecca. May I call you Rebecca? A beautiful name. I would love a cup of your very hot, very strong coffee, Rebecca."

"Cream and sugar with your coffee?"

"Black."

"One black coffee coming up. Anything for you, Thomas?" she asked. She was looking right at me. I fell momentarily in love.

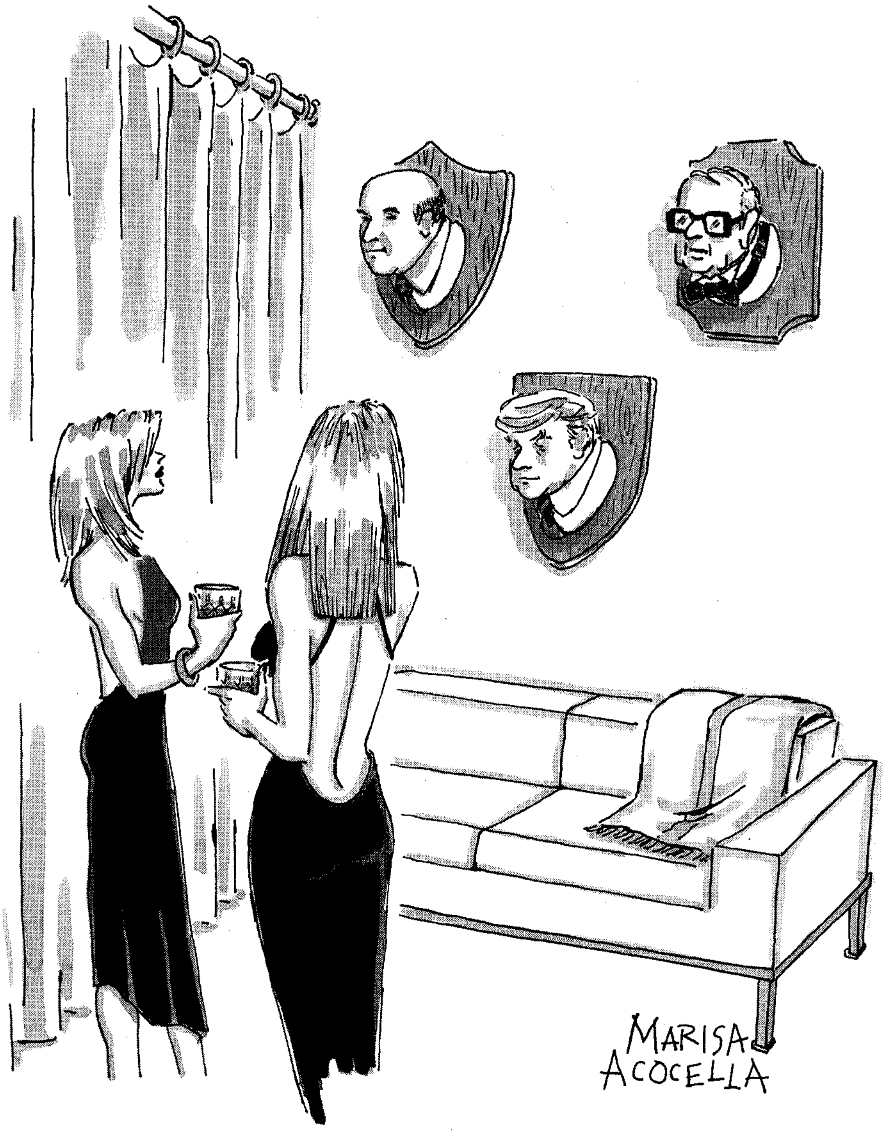
"What? Not yet! Water is fine!"

She wrote in her pad. She handed us menus. She said, "One coffee and one water." She walked off.

"Incredible," I whispered to Manuel after our waitress had marched away on her long legs. Escobar nodded, and I realized that he thought I was referring not to him, to his brazen style, but to the girl, her dark good looks. I let the matter drop, since he was, in a way, correct.

"How is your Jane?" he asked me.

Why was I unable to respond with a simple, perfunctory answer to this meaningless, polite question? It was because I was intuitively aware that Escobar wanted to make love to my wife, and I was therefore reluctant to allow him access to her, even through me—especially through me.



"Trophy husbands."

Actually, I don't dislike Escobar. It has occurred to me from time to time that an affair between this man and my wife could be harmless enough, and might solve a variety of problems in my home life. I said to him, strategically, "Jane is fond of you. The other night she remarked on how much she likes talking to you. Give her a call, Manuel. Drop by the house."

"No, Thomas. I would not feel in the right place." Escobar sounded sincere, and, despite the fact that I found his formulation of discomfort alarming (what, precisely, might be "the right place"?—an hourly-rate motel on the highway?), I experienced a brief moment of liking the man intensely; and then the restaurant's front door opened and in came a group of analysts, including Maria, who clacked hurriedly over on her high heels, past the cash register and the little bar area with bottled beers displayed, around the fish tank and the glass case stocked with candies, syrup, and fruit preserves for sale. Around the tables she came. Maria clattered over to our booth, leaned across the place settings, kissed Escobar on the lips, and announced, "Your paper on sibling-murder fantasies among children of recovered alcoholics is extraordinary, Manuel."

"Ah," answered Escobar.

I, for one, am always made uneasy by these rituals of professional approval. I believe established colleagues do well to assume one another's integrity and accomplishment, and leave it at that. I make it a rule never to give people favorable opinions of their work—not even those exceptional, open-minded people who admire my theories concerning reality and its dissolution through polite social conversation.

"He's a genius," Maria said to me. She took off her coat and hung it from a peg near the booth.

"Who's a genius? *Tom?*" cried a man standing behind Maria. It was Richard Bernhardt, in his red sports jacket and the ridiculous panama hat he never, as far as I can tell, takes off in public. Bernhardt wedged himself into the booth beside me, and Maria squeezed in next to Escobar, and we all sat quietly—groups that contain Bernhardt, I have found, immediately become anxious, wary, ill at ease, and this is a problem for the man, since he specializes in Group—until Rebecca arrived with Escobar's espresso-strength coffee. I found myself unable not to gaze at this girl's black hair. Was it dyed or natural? I made a mental note to give Rebecca the recruitment speech for my Young Women of Strength program—sometime later, in private, without all these shrinks around to make her feel inadequate or insecure.

In the meantime, to irritate Bernhardt I said, "I agree with Maria. Manuel is one of our important thinkers."

After that I felt depressed, as I knew I would after praising an associate, or even an intimate.

In fact, Escobar is a shrewd, insightful, compassionate therapist. One might wish that he would become less involved in patients' lives outside the consulting room (the recent, unsettling incident with Mrs. Jackson and the countersigned insurance-claim checks comes to mind). However, Escobar is a European. His unorthodox, interdisciplinary methods naturally reflect some sort of traditional cultural orientation.

"You're that party of doctors from the mental institute, aren't you?" Rebecca said.

"That's right," Bernhardt answered, giving me a wonderful chance to contradict him on a fine point. I knew I shouldn't—you have to watch your step with Bernhardt; he's grandiose and will lose his temper and, on occasion, shout—but it was irresistible.

"We're not doctors. At least, I don't think anyone at our table has a medical degree," I said, looking around at the faces of my companions.

Bernhardt said, "Tom, I don't know about you, but I have a Ph.D. in clinical psychology." Food had not yet been served, and already Richard was getting worked up over genital-potency issues.

I explained to our waitress, "It's true that we are clinical psychologists. Those with doctorates may call themselves doctors if they choose, but most of us are not doctors in the way that people routinely think of doctors."

She—bless her heart—recalled, "I had this jerk for a history teacher in eleventh grade. He got a Ph.D. through the mail or somewhere and then made everyone call him *Doctor* Woody."

"My Ph.D. is *not* mail-order." Bernhardt's face beneath his panama hat was suddenly brilliantly red.

"Richard, it's all right. Take it easy." Maria reached across the tabletop and stroked Bernhardt's sleeve, lightly, reassuringly, professionally.

"How can I take it easy? Tom has no idea how to get along with peers. I worked hard for my Ph.D. It gets so I'm afraid to take pride in my accomplishments."

"Tom didn't mean to hurt your feelings, Richard. I'm certain he respects your credentials. Isn't that right, Tom?" asked Maria, the diplomat.

"Sure."

At that point, more analysts barged in. Peter Konwicki, Elizabeth Cole, Dan Graham, Terry Kropp, Mike Breuer—and Dr. Sherwin Lang, the gynecologist turned psychiatrist, whose relationship with alcohol may or may not have been getting in the way of his relationships with analysands. Greetings were transacted, and the Bernhardt situation was momentarily defused as, one after another, adjacent tables filled with personnel. Someone put money in a tableside jukebox, and a popular tune played. The waitresses in their blue dresses came and went, shouldering dinner plates and metal trays stacked with silverware. Our waitress approached and said, "Ready, Doctors?"

"Two eggs over easy with hash browns and extra cinnamon-raisin toast with butter on the side," said Bernhardt.

"The country sausage and eggs, I guess," Maria said next.

Manuel requested more coffee, nothing but black coffee, and then it was my turn.

"Well, I'm torn between the blueberry pancakes and the eggs Benedict. Are the blueberries fresh?"

"Yes, sir."

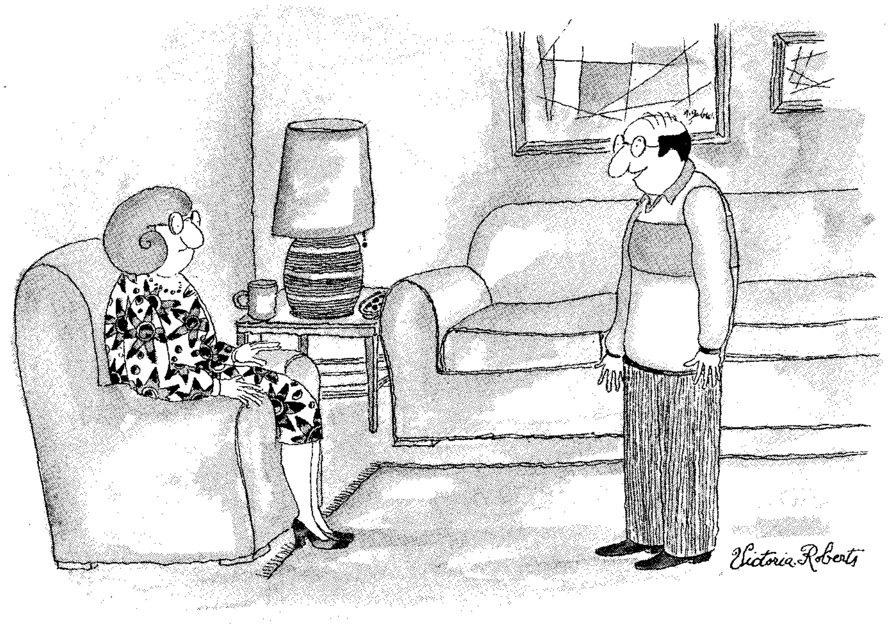
"Treat yourself to pancakes, Tom," Bernhardt said.

I explained, "I like pancakes, but with pancakes a little goes a long way. They leave me feeling stuffed."

"I know what you mean."

"On the other hand, whenever I have the chance to order them and don't, I regret it."

Rebecca waited. My institute associates glared at me, and the noisy room got, I thought, quieter. I was in danger of acute vacillation and could feel my face growing hot, the skin tingling. Choice, with its inevitable invitations to loss, is always such a trial. It does not matter, in my experience, that a particular choice consists in apparently unweighty alternatives. Quite the opposite. Choices between banalities are some of our more intimidating ordeals in life. We all know how the simplest dilemmas can lead, through symbolic and emotional pathways in the unconscious, to larger, often painful issues facing us at work and at home. Let's take an example, a hypothetical case, from home. An upstairs room needs painting. The room is quite cozy, with attractive floors and a view of trees and neighboring yards. But its walls, blemished with scuffs, spackle, and dirt, have been an eyesore for a long, long time—ever since the present owners (Jane and I, naturally) first occupied this little house. It will take an afternoon, two at most, to prep and paint the room. Painted, it might be comfortably used as a small, sunlit study. Nevertheless, years have passed and the room remains vacant, destitute, unclean; its door is rarely opened. Downstairs, in the kitchen, beneath knives in a drawer, lies a manila envelope holding paint chips. Colors range from the cool whites and baby blues to lemon yellows and delicate salmons. The wife in question (Jane) insists that any color is fine with her. Her (Jane's) husband (I) secretly suspect(s) that this is not the case. He (I) think(s) that she (Jane) wants a sturdy, masculine blue, because he (I) feel(s) that she (Jane) is secretly hoping for a baby (ours) to live in this room, and he (I) suspect(s), judging from other things known about her (the wife)—things better not explored in depth at this moment—that she (my beloved) would, without a doubt, favor a boy. I (a boy myself once, currently a grown man, who, like all men, experiences many conflicts, doubts, and insecurities in life) have (has) the usual, probably stereotypical fears and reservations about infant children, and boys in particular—the added financial strain, the inevitable displacement of the man (me again!) by another (my own baby boy, no less), leading to diminished sexual relations, growing jealousy, fits of general desperation, and eventual panic, leading (if I know myself at all) to flight (most likely to one of the chain motels along the highway leading west from town) as a form of retaliation, followed in due course by return, contrition, reconciliations, conscience-stricken attempts at repair, and, finally, resumed couples coun-



"I've cleaned out the garage—now may I file for divorce?"

selling with Maria—as well as certain distinctly *personal* terrors that derive from my own history as a child coming of age in an environment (home of origin, with all *its* problems) that is currently being reviewed and, to a large extent, relived (in my marriage, in my work with patients, in my own, ongoing analysis with old Dr. Mandelbaum), an environment in which I (the gloomy, doubting boy I once was) obviously failed to reach the depressive position and, subsequently, to develop a number of the crucial interpersonal insights and skills associated with mature behavior. This is not, as you can see, turning out to be a particularly simple example, especially when you consider the ways in which inner conflicts manifest, in close relationships, as vulnerabilities. Jane reflexively accommodates my fears and desires, as I do hers; together, man and wife, we collude in a mutual conspiracy to shelter and protect each other from our own and each other's inevitable and final abandonment. The simple question "What color do you want to paint that upstairs room?" might, if we follow things to their logical conclusions, be stated, "How do I live, knowing that I will one day die and leave you?"

"I don't know! I don't know!" I shouted at my Pancake House table companions. My breath was short and my hands were chilled; sweat broke out on my arms and my back, and I felt overcome with guilt.

"Easy, Tom," Bernhardt said. He sounded genuinely concerned and also a little frightened. He suggested, "Look, buddy, you can pick from both sides of that menu."

"I can?"

"Yes," said Rebecca.

"Really?"

It was true. Why hadn't I considered this? I asked, "Will it cost extra?"

"There's a two-dollar charge for combination plates." Rebecca had such a sweet manner.

"Two dollars. That's not so *baaad*," Maria said in a childish voice; she was, as we say in the psychology trade, talking me down.

I took a deep breath. I took another. "O.K. This is a pancake restaurant. Bring me some blueberry pancakes."

Easy as that, it was done, and I felt the awful pressures subside, and I was able, almost miraculously, to make subsequent, smaller choices. Breath by gentle breath, my calm returned. I placed my order as, outside the window, the world turned dark. Inside, the lights shone brightly, and noises were getting louder, as my institute colleagues called out to one another, yelled from table to table across the room. It was terrific to see everyone drinking coffee and laughing, and I felt, as I rarely do anymore, that the mental-health community is made up of gracious, affable men and women.

My pleasant mood did not last. I am afraid that I am not inclined toward a merry or carefree outlook.

"Tom, my friend, I think you ordered the right thing. Those blueberry pancakes look good," Bernhardt said after the food arrived. I did not enjoy the way the man leaned into my territory when he spoke—the dry breath on my cheek, the hat brim almost grazing my head—but, in spite of this, I felt touched by the awkwardness of Bernhardt's transparent good-will tactics.

"Have a bite."

"I couldn't."

"Go ahead, Richard. There's more here than I can eat. Dig in."

"I've got dried eggs all over my fork, Tom. Why don't you cut me off a section?"

"Richard, take a bite. Please. I don't care about the eggs," I lied, shoving my pancakes toward him down the table, establishing distance under cover of generosity.

"Do you want some of these eggs, Tom?"

"No, thanks."

"Toast?" asked the Group counsellor.

"No toast for me."

"Cinnamon-raisin toast. I've got plenty."

"I see. How many slices of toast do you have there, Richard? Seven? Eight?"

"This sausage is good," Maria said, getting into the conversation. "Tom? Sausage?"

"I'll pass, Maria."

"Is that sausage hot?" Bernhardt asked. The man was without shame. He turned toward me and said, "You've got a nice piece of ham here, Tom."

"That's Canadian bacon."

"Is that what it is? It's delicious, isn't it? Not as spicy as Maria's sausage. You can pour syrup on the sausage to tone it down," Bernhardt said, chewing.

Escobar, watching Bernhardt eat from other people's plates, wore the clinician's slightly engaged, slightly weary expression. What did he think, in moments like these, of Americans?

It is worth considering, in light of this question, the ways that national, ethnic, and religious prejudices express, on a larger scale, the tendency among people in relationships to sicken and enrage one another. "What does Escobar think of Americans?" might be interestingly re-stated, "How can Judy Bernhardt dine with her husband without wanting him dead?"

"Oh, dear. I ate too much meat. I can feel my heart struggling to push the blood through the veins." Bernhardt sighed. And, truly, the big man looked unwell. Moisture beaded his forehead; his small eyes had become enlarged and protrusive; and his breathing was, all of a sudden, rapid, shallow, alarmingly loud.

"Richard? Are you feeling all right?" Maria asked.

He leaned back from the table; he managed a lengthy, sucking inhalation, a sound horrible to hear. "Better in a minute—catch my breath—piece of your hot sausage—stuck," he sputtered. Saliva, a clotted spray, discharged from his mouth. What was the right thing to do? Strike the man on the back? I reached out, raised my hand to wallop Bernhardt's shoulder blades, and Maria exclaimed, "Tom, don't!"

"No?"

Bernhardt's face was the color of blood. His eyes looked ready to fly from their sockets. I was disappointed at not being allowed to hit him.

Maria explained, "Slapping a person on the back can dangerously lodge a foreign particle in the esophagus." I could not help imagining that were Rebecca nearby she would get a clear demonstration of the fact that we were not, any of us, bona-fide doctors, or even competent in an emergency. Only Manuel remained unperturbed. Manuel always carries and expresses himself with great poise. He said to our colleague, "Listen to me. Are you listening? Swallow."

We waited while Bernhardt gulped. The man was under great strain. He wasn't suffocating—not yet.

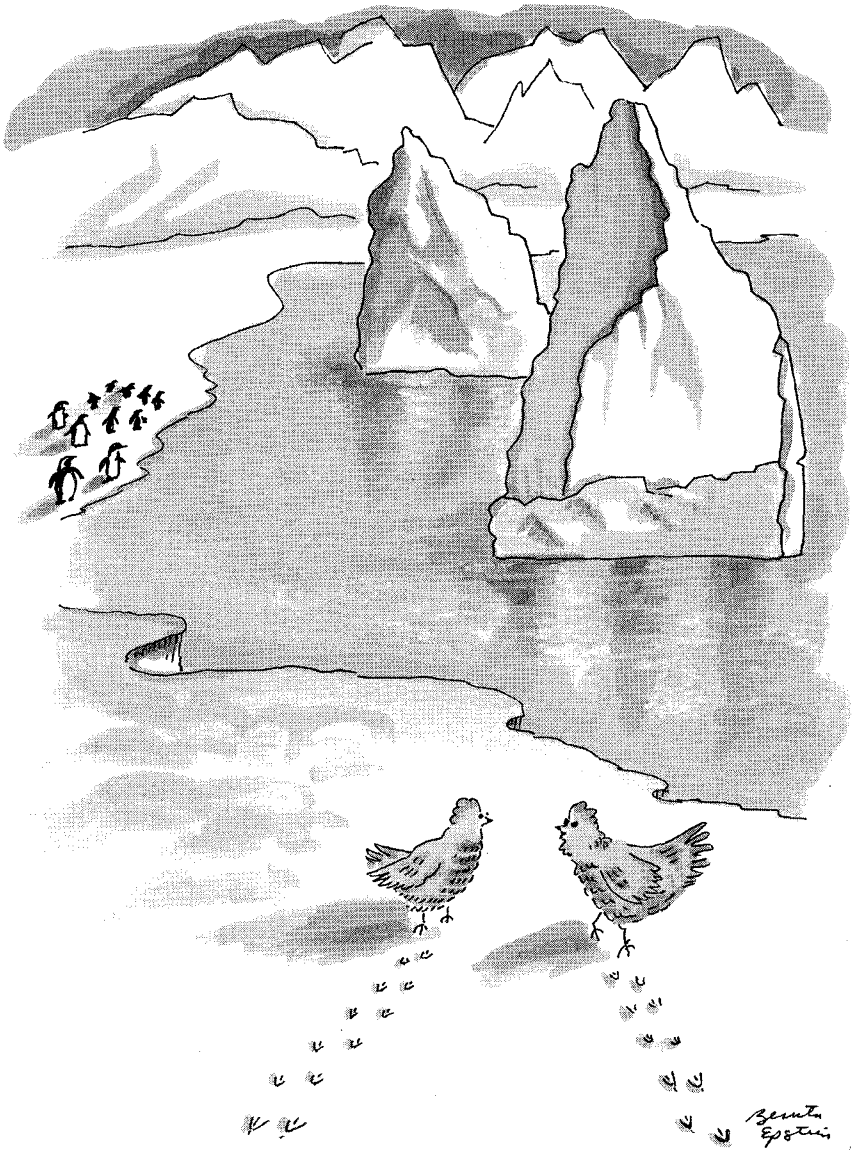
"Swallow," said Manuel again. "Swallow." Hearing Manuel's voice, I could not help thinking about our waitress, about the way Manuel had ordered coffee from her; and I imagined, then, Manuel's voice speaking in a whisper, seductively, to my Jane. "I love to look at your back. You are so beautiful. Tom does not appreciate your beauty. He is a fool. Now lean forward and hold tightly to the bannister," I imagined Manuel saying to her.

The atmosphere was tense. Complex power dynamics were at work. Bernhardt, by threatening to fatally gag on other people's food, had taken the role of usurper, "capturing" not only the food but the sympathies of his peers. He held cinnamon-raisin toast in one hand and his napkin in the other. He made a noise in his throat, and this noise sounded beautiful, forlorn, like faraway bagpipes or wind in trees. As if in response to Bernhardt's sound, Maria leaned forward across the tabletop; she leaned toward the fat man. She looked as if she might weep. She did not touch Bernhardt; her hands floated, tentative, in the air near Richard's face. What beautiful fingers she had. I felt, looking at Maria's face and those hands, as if I were a trespasser witnessing something wonderful and mysterious.

In this way it became clear—from this tableau made by these two: the man struggling for breath, the woman craning toward him, and their lovely stillness as, for a moment, they regarded each other—it became clear, in the way these things become, in such a public moment, oddly, inexplicably clear to others, that Maria and Bernhardt were sleeping together.

Or was it conceivable that I only imagined this scenario (the scenario and my perception of it), because I had actually perceived—in ways that I did not understand and could not account for, that evening over pancakes, bacon, and a salad—that Manuel, our Kleinian across the table, was already sleeping with my wife?

In other words, had Manuel somehow told me a truth about his involvement with Jane, without telling me anything at all? And was it not possible, even likely, if this was so, that everyone was sleeping with everyone—including



"They never should have allowed us to be free-range."

Bernhardt and Maria? The question I am raising is this: Did my belief that my institute colleagues were lovers come from observation and recognition of subtle interpersonal signals, the unconscious communications between them, or did it come from inside *me*, from my own barely perceptible feelings and awarenesses, those feelings that I was not, at the time, fully alert to, feelings about Manuel, about Jane, about sex and rivalry in sex, about the strange and precarious nature of human relationships, about the excruciating complexities of infidelity, stolen ecstasy, and guilt?

"Swallow."

Bernhardt shuddered; his Adam's apple rose, then fell. Food, it seemed, went down. Muscles in Bernhardt's neck relaxed, and he raised his napkin and spat out more food he had not forced down. This food he wrapped, meticulously, in the napkin. The crisis was over, and we all leaned back in our seats. Bernhardt took a drink from his water glass and said, "That always happens."

I felt, in that instant, unable to remain in a booth with this overweight father figure. "Richard, would you excuse me for a minute?"

"Sure thing, buddy. You want to get up?" Bernhardt asked before biting toast—the man still eating in spite of the problems eating caused. He waved his toast in the air, a little motion presumably indicating that he would move aside as soon as he finished chewing. Others in the noisy restaurant raised forks and cups, but my appetite was gone; life felt wretched to me. Maria, a beauty when younger and still handsome in her forties—stylishly dressed, carefully made up, and wearing good shoes, that sort of thing—appeared, to my eyes, that night at the Pancake House & Bar, tired and a little displeased, aged somehow: by time, naturally, but also by disappointment, by, I suppose you could say, the disappointments of living. Her mouth as she ate worked slowly. With each new bite, Maria's tongue came out, far out, in the manner of a tongue at the onset of fellatio, one of those intense, illicit blow jobs she used to give whenever the two of us could slip away, late on an afternoon, to the institute's book-and-manuscript vault, the subcellar archive with no windows, back in our early days as institute trainees. Out came the tongue to meet the food on the fork. Maria's tongue was thick and blue, you could say purple almost; and it had the blunted, rounded contours of a medium-sized putty knife. Here was a tongue that, believe me, kissing, could really fill your mouth. Now food previously taken in, little spots of wet color, clung to its surface.

And so the erotic in memory becomes, at a later stage in life, unseemly. Again and again Maria's tongue emerged, met, then blanketed and enveloped the lump of oncoming fried sausage or the scrambled eggs or a piece of potato; next it slowly withdrew, a violet thing luring the fork toward Maria's mouth. Fillings were visible, silver, shimmering; and I could see, deep in her mouth, that dead tooth that had gone brown. It is probably true that I would not have been so disturbed by Maria's mouth, her chewing and swallowing, had I not wished, maybe for old times' sake, as they say, to feel, again, that heavy tongue pushing past her teeth, past *my* teeth.

Have you ever noticed?—people, no matter how beautiful or desirable, invariably will, if observed closely while going about their daily business of keeping alive, begin to seem like monsters.

Bernhardt was not moving from the booth. I watched him eat. It would not be wrong to say that I was, in a manifestly physical sense, sickened by the sight.

"Thomas, what are you doing?" asked Escobar.

"I'm afraid I'm not feeling well, Manuel. I think I need to walk around. I'll be fine if I get some air." I turned my body. I secured a grip on the seat back, then hoisted my feet, first the left, then the right foot, out from beneath the low tabletop. I bent my knees and raised my legs. I rested my shoes on the seat. I was working in a tight space. "Watch out, Richard. Don't move." I half stood on the seat and, leaning sideways against the seat back, keeping my balance, taking care not to knock Bernhardt in the head, wormed one leg, the left, up, over, and down into the vacant booth behind. From there it was an easy slide into the empty seat and freedom. I saw co-workers watching me, and I noticed our waitress watching, too, and I waved to her and shrugged my shoulders and rolled my eyes and made a goofy face and a lot of relatively meaningless hand gestures in the air, and she smiled.

Bernhardt took another distressed breath. "Do you see what I mean, Maria? The man has no regard for social protocols. He's like a two-year-old!"

I have to admit that this was, as a diagnosis, pretty much correct. I have found, however, that it is best to understand Bernhardt's criticisms and complaints—no matter how flattering, when considered in the right context—as nothing more than self-administered medications against his own terror of vitality, autonomy, playfulness, the life force in any form. I stood and said, "This is a pancake restaurant, Richard."

"What the hell has that got to do with it?"

I spoke to Bernhardt—spoke, as well, to the entire room, all my Krakower Institute peers gathered around tables stacked with dishes and balled napkins and half-empty cups. Waitresses circled, offering refills. Strangers at distant booths stopped talking, finished chewing, and attended to my improvised discourse.

"What is a pancake? Cooked batter, covered in sugar and butter. Condiments are applied to it. It is food. But it is not as a food, not as sustenance, that we crave the pancake. No, the pancake, or flapjack, if you will, is a childish pleasure; smothered in syrup, buried beneath ice cream, the pancake symbolizes our escape from respectability, eating as a form of infantile play. The environments where pancakes are served and consumed are, in this context, special playrooms for a public ravenous for sweetness, that delirious sweetness of long-ago breakfasts made by Mother, the sweetness of our infancy and our great, lost toddler's omnipotence. Look around. Notice, if you will, these lighting fixtures suspended from the ceiling like pretty mobiles over a crib. Notice the indestructible plastic orange seating materials designed to repel spills and stains. Notice these menus that unfold like colorful, laminated boards in those games we once played on rainy days at home, those unforgettable indoor days when we felt safe and warm, when we knew ourselves, absolutely, to be loved. We come to the Pancake House because we are hungry. We call out in our hearts to our mothers, and it is the Pancake House that answers. The Pancake House holds us! The Pancake House restores us to beloved infancy! The Pancake House is our mother in this motherless world!"

I reached down and grabbed a handful of cinnamon-raisin toast from Bernhardt's plate. I surveyed the room.

"Don't do what I think you're thinking of doing, Tom," Bernhardt warned behind me.

I calculated the distance—three square tables covered with blue cloths and placed corner to corner, a diamond pattern allowing waitress-and-tray-width walking grids between and around each table—to Peter Konwicki's head. The child psychologists all saw what was coming and hid behind menus. I said to Bernhardt, "You've got to relax and have fun for a change, Dick."

"Don't call me Dick."

I felt a hand on my arm. It was Bernhardt's. This man's hand grasped my arm—the fingers wrapping tightly around my forearm, pinching my arm—so that I could not move or shake free to throw the toast.

"Get your hands off me, Richard."

"Drop the bread, Tom."

As always when dealing with an unpleasant dispute over professional conduct or ideology—ours was, after all, a *professional* pancake gathering—I looked, hopefully, to other factions for support.

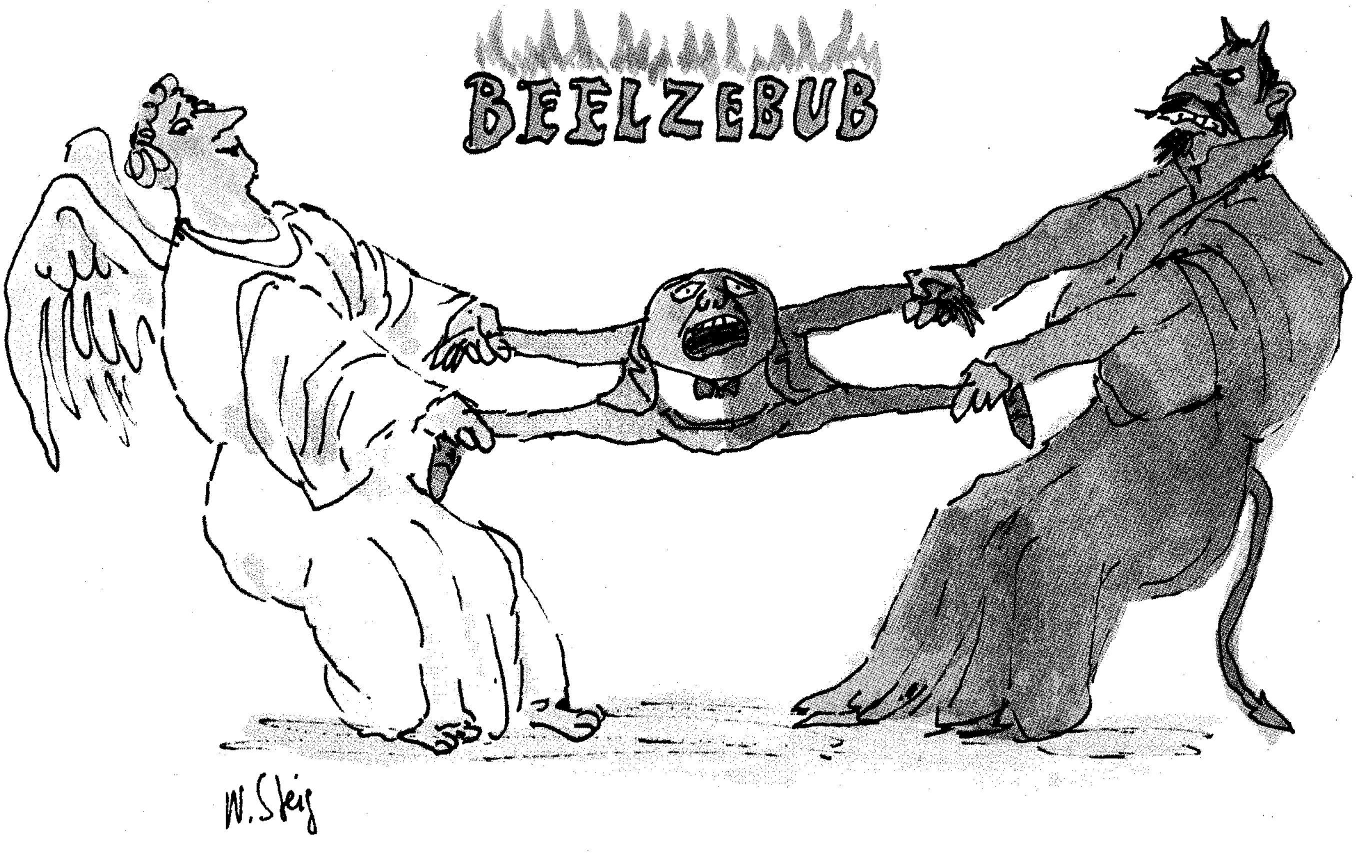
"Tom, Richard is right. We don't want a food fight tonight. I'm sure it would be a tension reliever, but everyone is already having such a pleasant evening. Can't we just drink our coffee?" This from Maria, who said to our foreign companion, "More coffee, Manuel?"

Escobar watched me and Bernhardt the way he watched everything in life—inscrutably, intelligently—and it was impossible not to admire his competence as a speaker in an adopted language when he said, "Thomas embraces a revolutionary spirit in his work. We must not ask him to behave otherwise in society. Let him hurl these pieces of toast like new and radical ideas that must be cast into the world. Pieces of toast like angry children who will hit us and upset us and change our ways of thinking and feeling."

"Thank you, Manuel," I said, tugging my arm, trying to break loose and lob a Hail Mary shot over the open menus barricading the child psychologists. It was all too much for Bernhardt. The man heaved himself up from his seat and, in a rash and impulsive moment, seized me in a bear hug. His arms wrapped around me. It was fantastic to be held by this man with the huge body and the arms that squeezed and squeezed.

My hands were pinned to my sides. Bernhardt's stomach against my back felt soft, warm, repulsive. I could hear his wheezing as he breathed, the oxygen going in, the blood-heated exhalations streaming out. His hat brim pressed against my head, and I could smell a perfume of geraniums—or maybe lilies—in the mixture of Bernhardt's breath, his sweat, and his clothing, his shampoo and shaving lotion. He rested his chin against my shoulder, and we swayed from side to side, while his arms crushed my ribs.

Looking across the restaurant, I saw friends and strangers, the analysts and the waitresses and, near the door, an intact family with small children, and, also, a young couple—attractive, sullen teen-agers killing time in a corner. No one, not even our busy Rebecca, ate or moved or looked away from the humiliating spectacle of Bernhardt lifting me a foot or more off the floor, Bern-



hardt holding me high in the air, cradling me.

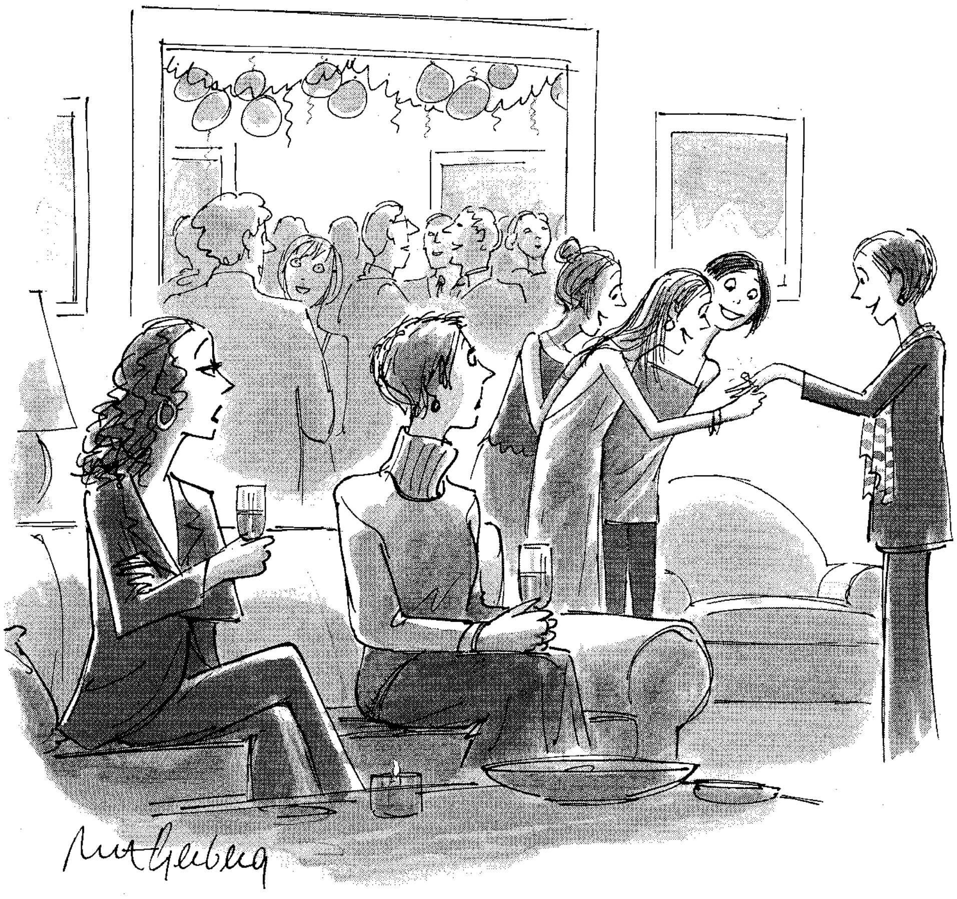
For a moment I hung there. Bernhardt, his breath tickling the hairs sprouting from my ear, whispered, "Say uncle."

That was when I felt the sadness coming on. It was not surprising, given the circumstances. How often are we, as adults, raised up and carried like babies—in public!—softly spoken to by a man whose face we cannot see, a man who is enormous and powerful, terrifying, as he holds us aloft? Try this sometime if you don't believe me when I say that the experience will make you weep with sorrow and regret for all the trouble you have caused—will cause—for the people most dear to you. My thoughts, naturally, went to Jane. Here came Jane, the image of her, filling my mind and my heart, that night in the Pancake House, that evening in Bernhardt's arms—*Jane! Jane!* I am the one, not she, who remains, after all our years together, frightened by love. Or I should say that I am frightened, and so is Jane; we are frightened in our different though complementary ways. Sometimes, on an evening in winter, when the house is only dimly lit by reading lamps and the fire is burning in our fireplace, I might happen to see her standing idly in the living room's soft half-glow, her face lit by firelight and her body veiled in shadows that flicker, then disappear; or, later, insomniac and anxious in the cold night hours, I might peer down on her as, wrapped in sheets, she sleeps; or, the next day, a rainy, windy day at home, I will hear footsteps on creaking floorboards overhead—Jane upstairs, walking back and forth, doing some small thing, shutting windows against the storm—and during these or a thousand similar household moments, interludes of relative quiet, of no apparent consequence insofar as nothing consequential is taking place, I will be struck, swiftly, deeply, absolutely, with the presence of her—I don't know what else to call this—her bodily presence and the weight in the room, in the house, of another life, her life, charged as it is with her feelings and thoughts, the lonely, playful, idiosyncratic, and remarkable moods that seem, as moods (especially bad moods) do, virtually to radiate outward from her—I believe this is what people mean when they talk about a person's spirit—permeating the air and turning the whole environment into an arena of sexuality and heat.

But I am straying from the scene at hand: Bernhardt, the obese Group counsellor, the Ph.D., hugging me to him like a father hugging his baby girl. What strength this man had! His arms—one red coat sleeve crossed over the other—were wrapped around me, encircling me; his hands' open palms pressed against my belly and my ribs. He squeezed and the breath went out of me and I felt dizzy and sick to my stomach. I leaned back, turned my head, and peered over Bernhardt's shoulder; I gazed, from my high perch, helplessly down at our table. Bernhardt the horrible father whispered into my ear, "You're nothing but trouble, Tom. That's why we love you. I know it may surprise you to hear that we love you, but it's true. I'll say it again. We're your co-workers, and we love you. Sometimes, though, you get carried away and you have to be stopped, Tom, because when you get carried away, when you go too far and play too hard, then things get out of control, and when things get out of control everyone feels bad. Why does everyone feel bad? I'll tell you why. When you start climbing across the furniture or throwing toast or spitting water at people, all those silly things you like to do around the office or during important meetings or at dinner parties, then the world gets crazy and unpredictable, and everyone around you, all the people who love you, we all get swept up in your craziness, and before long we feel sad. We feel sad and lost. We know what it means to be you, Tom."

"You do?" I whispered. Breathing was hard, and the plates on the table looked nauseating beneath overhead light.

"Yes, Tom. We do," confided Bernhardt, applying another squeeze. I had the sense that Bernhardt was using me, that night, as a fragile, middle-aged totemic object signifying childhood and—if I know him, with his fondness for D. W. Winnicott, the Squiggle game, and various improvisational-play theories that owe a lot to so-called radical avant-garde theatre and the



"She's registered at Salomon Smith Barney."

whole "process over performance" approach to role-playing and creative living in general—Bernhardt was using me, as I was saying, as a human totem signifying childhood and the depression that grows with the healthy child's capacity for love and hatred in mature relationships. I know that Bernhardt employs dolls, sandboxes, crayons, and various stuffed animals in his practice with adults, often with remarkable results. Now I was the doll, Bernhardt the big man holding me, and the world, because I floated above it, became magical and safe.

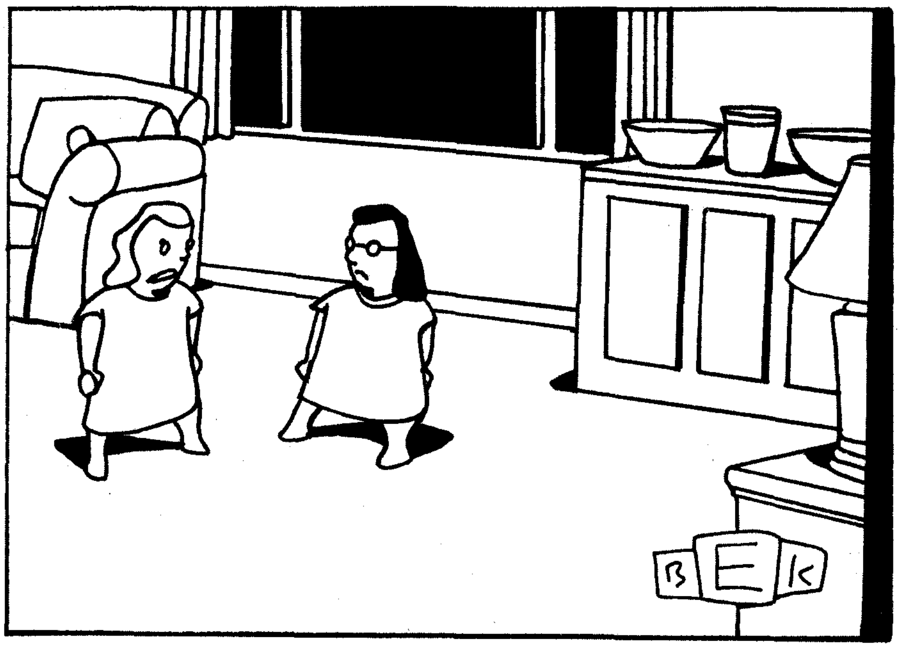
I was sweating. I felt cared for. My hand opened. The cinnamon-raisin toast, the few slices of toast, dropped, broken and inedible, to the floor.

"That's better," growled the voice in my ear, the menacing, nurturing, comforting voice of the adult.

My palms were dusted with crumbs. I wiped the crumbs on Bernhardt. People were watching, the entire crowded, silent restaurant. I understood, gazing sadly at my colleagues' faces, that this was an occasion for embarrassment. But why? For what reason?

I closed my eyes and hyperventilated—a dozen short breaths. I did not ask Bernhardt to set me down. Standing unsupported was, I felt, out of the question; and I had the impression, anyway, that I was drifting upward, rising farther and farther from the ground.

It was then, while Bernhardt squeezed—it was then that I began my ascent toward the ceiling. Up I went. I have to confess that I felt, ascending, a bit scared. I am not as a rule happy or comfortable on rocking boats or on airplanes thrown by turbulence or on the average amusement-park ride, or even cruising in an automobile on a hilly lane; and I can say from experience—I think people who endure motion sickness will concur—that the first sensations of nausea are invariably accompanied by a swift and debilitating panic, a flush of hotness and fear that grows intense and then becomes a chief symptom of the illness.



"Try falling down and scraping your knee. Then you can talk to me about pain."

• •

Bernhardt squeezed, and up I went, up toward the Pancake House ceiling, drifting higher to float over the heads of clinicians and waitresses gathered around tables piled with waffles, uneaten bacon, biscuits. How I wished I had been sensible and ordered eggs over easy. But it was too late, the pancakes were inside me, and I was hovering beneath the ceiling, up beneath pendulous, institutional lights, and the air against my face felt warm and still, and my friends' faces below me appeared pale and minuscule, and I could smell Bernhardt's soap and his dry skin, those bad clothes and the man's breath like too sweet flower petals brushing my face, filling my nose and my mouth with rotten perfume. I felt the big man's arms wrapped around me. I held on as best I could, reached up with my hands and clasped his tightly in mine to keep from floating too high or, alternatively, from losing balance and falling forward across chairs and tables. Outside, the wind stormed in off the silver river that flows through our city; and I imagined, briefly and stupidly, that if I could only sail over near a window I might be carried out of the Pancake House, back toward town and, with any luck, home—up and away over the delightful covered bridge and the book factory and surrounding neighborhoods crowded with porno theatres, tattoo parlors, all those intriguing and dangerous barrooms—straight back to Jane.

Possibly the wind might carry me away from Jane. It occurred to me that flying on the wind was a precious, extremely literary idea—not in the least the sort of psychological concept I can feel good about—and that, furthermore, even if it were truly possible to travel through the air, a very short journey of this nature would, undoubtedly, leave me sick as a dog, as they say.

At this point, I knew that I had gone into an emotionally disassociated state—exactly the kind of out-of-body condition that is seen among victims of trauma or abuse.

Bernhardt, whether alert to this fact or not, was attempting to destroy me, apparently through some form of metaphoric patriarchal rape. The intimacy between us was real and devastating. I was, I felt, in danger of a psychoneurotic splitting off—a costly form of self-protection—the proof of which was my thoroughly tactile appreciation of the man's proximity, of his body's pressure, its aggressive and hot contact with mine. I loved this awful man, and he was deeply in love with me. In order to bear this knowledge and the attendant physical violation, our embrace, I had no recourse but to escape into a transient psychotic breakdown and its exhilarating symptoms. Was this—my withdrawal from tenderness—what was meant by "astral projection"? Could I, in this momentary awakening to love, break the bonds of gravitation, soar heavenward, and explore the unknown, infinite universe? It was certainly worth a try. ♦

FICTION

THE BEAR CAME OVER THE MOUNTAIN

BY ALICE MUNRO

FIONA lived in her parents' house, in the town where she and Grant went to university. It was a big, bay-windowed house that seemed to Grant both luxurious and disorderly, with rugs crooked on the floors and cup rings bitten into the table varnish. Her mother was Icelandic—a powerful woman with a froth of white hair and indignant far-left politics. The father was an important cardiologist, revered around the hospital but happily subservient at home, where he would listen to his wife's strange tirades with an absent-minded smile. Fiona had her own little car and a pile of cashmere sweaters, but she wasn't in a sorority, and her mother's political activity was probably the reason. Not that she cared. Sororities were a joke to her, and so was politics—though she liked to play "The Four Insurgent Generals" on the phonograph, and sometimes also the "Internationale," very loud, if there was a guest she thought she could make nervous. A curly-haired gloomy-looking foreigner was courting her—she said he was a Visigoth—and so were two or three quite respectable and uneasy young interns. She made fun of them all and of Grant as well. She would drolly repeat some of his small-town phrases. He thought maybe she was joking when she proposed to him, on a cold bright day on the beach at Port Stanley. Sand was stinging their faces and the waves delivered crashing loads of gravel at their feet.

"Do you think it would be fun—" Fiona shouted. "Do you think it would be fun if we got married?"

He took her up on it, he shouted yes. He wanted never to be away from her. She had the spark of life.

JUST before they left their house Fiona noticed a mark on the kitchen floor. It came from the cheap black house shoes she had been wearing earlier in the day.

"I thought they'd quit doing that," she said in a tone of ordinary annoyance and perplexity, rubbing at the gray smear that looked as if it had been made by a greasy crayon.

She remarked that she'd never have to do this again, since she wasn't taking those shoes with her.

"I guess I'll be dressed up all the time," she said. "Or semi-dressed up. It'll be sort of like in a hotel."

She rinsed out the rag she'd been using and hung it on the rack inside the door under the sink. Then she put on her golden-brown, fur-collared ski jacket, over a white turtleneck sweater and tailored fawn slacks. She was a tall, narrow-shouldered woman, seventy years old but still upright and trim, with long legs and long feet, delicate wrists and ankles, and tiny, almost comical-looking ears. Her hair that was as light as milkweed fluff had gone from pale blond to white somehow without Grant's noticing exactly when, and she still wore it down to her shoulders, as her mother had done. (That was the thing that had alarmed Grant's own mother, a small-town widow who worked as a doctor's receptionist. The long white hair on Fiona's mother, even more than the state of the house, had told her all she needed to know about attitudes and politics.) But otherwise Fiona, with her fine bones and small sapphire eyes, was nothing like her mother. She had a slightly crooked mouth, which she emphasized now with red lipstick—usually the last thing she did before she left the house.

She looked just like herself on this day—direct and vague as in fact she was, sweet and ironic.

OVER a year ago, Grant had started noticing so many little yellow notes stuck up all over the house. That was not entirely new. Fiona had always written things down—the title of a book she'd heard mentioned on the radio or the jobs

CHRISTOPHER BURKETT, "FIR AND SNOW"/ANDREW SMITH GALLERY, SANTA FE

"I think what I miss most is robbing people."

• •

she wanted to make sure she got done that day. Even her morning schedule was written down. He found it mystifying and touching in its precision: "7 A.M. yoga. 7:30–7:45 teeth face hair. 7:45–8:15 walk. 8:15 Grant and breakfast."

The new notes were different. Stuck onto the kitchen drawers—Cutlery, Dishtowels, Knives. Couldn't she just open the drawers and see what was inside?

Worse things were coming. She went to town and phoned Grant from a booth to ask him how to drive home. She went for her usual walk across the field into the woods and came home by the fence line—a very long way round. She said that she'd counted on fences always taking you somewhere.

It was hard to figure out. She'd said that about fences as if it were a joke, and she had remembered the phone number without any trouble.

"I don't think it's anything to worry about," she said. "I expect I'm just losing my mind."

He asked if she had been taking sleeping pills.

"If I am I don't remember," she said. Then she said she was sorry to sound so flippant. "I'm sure I haven't been taking anything. Maybe I should be. Maybe vitamins."

Vitamins didn't help. She would stand in doorways trying to figure out where she was going. She forgot to turn on the burner under the vegetables or put water in the coffeemaker. She asked Grant when they'd moved to this house.

"Was it last year or the year before?"

"It was twelve years ago," he said.

"That's shocking."

"She's always been a bit like this," Grant said to the doctor. He tried without success to explain how Fiona's surprise and apologies now seemed somehow like routine courtesy, not quite concealing a private amusement. As if she'd stumbled on some unexpected adventure. Or begun playing a game that she hoped he would catch on to.

"Yes, well," the doctor said. "It might be selective at first. We don't know, do we? Till we see the pattern of the deterioration, we really can't say."

In a while it hardly mattered what label was put on it. Fiona, who no longer went shopping alone, disappeared from the supermarket while Grant had his back turned. A policeman picked her up as she was walking down the middle of the road, blocks away. He asked her name and she answered readily. Then he asked her the name of the Prime Minister.

"If you don't know that, young man, you really shouldn't be in such a responsible job."

He laughed. But then she made the mistake of asking if he'd seen Boris and Natasha. These were the now dead Russian wolfhounds she had adopted many years ago, as a favor to a friend, then devoted herself to for the rest of their lives. Her taking them over might have coincided with the discovery that she was not likely to have children. Something about her tubes being blocked, or twisted—Grant could not remember now. He had always avoided thinking about all that female apparatus. Or it might have been after her mother died. The dogs' long legs and silky hair, their narrow, gentle, intransigent faces made a fine match for her when she took them out for walks. And Grant himself, in those days, landing his first job at the university (his father-in-law's money welcome there in spite of the political taint), might have seemed to some people to have been picked up on another of Fiona's eccentric whims, and groomed and tended and favored—though, fortunately, he didn't understand this until much later.

THERE was a rule that nobody could be admitted to Meadowlake during the month of December. The holiday season had so many emotional pitfalls. So they made the twenty-minute drive in January. Before they reached the highway the country road dipped through a swampy hollow now completely frozen over.

Fiona said, "Oh, remember."

Grant said, "I was thinking about that, too."

"Only it was in the moonlight," she said.

She was talking about the time that they had gone out skiing at night under the full moon and over the black-striped snow, in this place that you could get into only in the depths of winter. They had heard the branches cracking in the cold.

If she could remember that, so vividly and correctly, could there really be so much the matter with her? It was all he could do not to turn around and drive home.

There was another rule that the supervisor explained to him. New residents were not to be visited during the first thirty days. Most people needed that time to get settled in. Before the rule had been put in place, there had been pleas and tears and tantrums, even from those who had come in willingly. Around the third or fourth day they would start lamenting and begging to be taken home. And some relatives could be susceptible to that, so you would have people being carted home who would not get on there any better than they had before. Six months or sometimes only a few weeks later, the whole upsetting hassle would have to be gone through again.

"Whereas we find," the supervisor said, "we find that if they're left on their own the first month they usually end up happy as clams."

They had in fact gone over to Meadowlake a few times several years ago to visit Mr. Farquhar, the old bachelor farmer who had been their neighbor. He had lived by himself in a drafty brick house unaltered since the early years of the century, except for the addition of a refrigerator and a television set. Now, just as Mr. Farquhar's house was gone, replaced by a gimcrack sort of castle that was the weekend home of some people from Toronto, the old Meadowlake was gone, though it had dated only from the fifties. The new building was a spacious, vaulted place, whose air was faintly, pleasantly pine-scented. Profuse and genuine greenery sprouted out of giant crocks in the hallways.

Nevertheless, it was the old Meadowlake that Grant found himself picturing Fiona in, during the long month he had to get through without seeing her. He phoned every day and hoped to get the nurse whose name was Kristy. She seemed a little amused at his constancy, but she would give him a fuller report than any other nurse he got stuck with.

Fiona had caught a cold the first week, she said, but that was not unusual for newcomers. "Like when your kids start school," Kristy said. "There's a whole bunch of new germs they're exposed to and for a while they just catch everything."

Then the cold got better. She was off the antibiotics and she didn't seem as confused as she had been when she came in. (This was the first Grant had heard about either the antibiotics or the confusion.) Her appetite was pretty good and she seemed to enjoy sitting in the sunroom. And she was making some friends, Kristy said.

If anybody phoned, he let the machine pick up. The people they saw socially, occasionally, were not close neighbors but people who lived around the country, who were retired, as they were, and who often went away without notice. They would imagine that he and Fiona were away on some such trip at present.

Grant skied for exercise. He skied around and around in the field behind the house as the sun went down and left the sky pink over a countryside that seemed to be bound by waves of blue-edged ice. Then he came back to the darkening house, turning the television news on while he made his supper. They had usually prepared supper together. One of them made the drinks and the other the fire, and they talked about his work (he was writing a study of legendary Norse wolves and particularly of the great wolf Fenrir, which swallows up Odin at the end of the world) and about whatever Fiona was reading and what they had been thinking during their close but separate day. This was their time of liveliest intimacy, though there was also, of course, the five or ten minutes of physical sweetness just after they got into bed—something that did not often end in sex but reassured them that sex was not over yet.

In a dream he showed a letter to one of his colleagues. The letter was from the roommate of a girl he had not thought of for a while and was sanctimonious and hostile, threatening in a whining way. The girl herself was someone he had parted from decently and it seemed unlikely that she would want to make a fuss, let alone try to kill herself, which was what the letter was

"We believe that in a former life she was an editor."

elaborately trying to tell him she had done.

He had thought of the colleague as a friend. He was one of those husbands who had been among the first to throw away their neckties and leave home to spend every night on a floor mattress with a bewitching young mistress—coming to their offices, their classes, bedraggled and smelling of dope and incense. But now he took a dim view.

"I wouldn't laugh," he said to Grant—who did not think he had been laughing. "And if I were you I'd try to prepare Fiona."

So Grant went off to find Fiona in Meadowlake—the old Meadowlake—and got into a lecture hall instead. Everybody was waiting there for him to teach his class. And sitting in the last, highest row was a flock of cold-eyed young women all in black robes, all in mourning, who never took their bitter stares off him, and pointedly did not write down, or care about, anything he was saying.

Fiona was in the first row, untroubled. "Oh phooey," she said. "Girls that age are always going around talking about how they'll kill themselves."

He hauled himself out of the dream, took pills, and set about separating what was real from what was not.

There *had* been a letter, and the word "rat" had appeared in black paint on his office door, and Fiona, on being told that a girl had suffered from a bad crush on him, had said pretty much what she said in the dream. The colleague hadn't come into it, and nobody had committed suicide. Grant hadn't been disgraced. In fact, he had got off easy when you thought of what might have happened just a couple of years later. But word got around. Cold shoulders became conspicuous. They had few Christmas invitations and spent New Year's Eve alone. Grant got drunk, and without its being required of him—also, thank God, without making the error of a confession—he promised Fiona a new life.

HOUR

The extra hour given back to eternity
The hour gained by travelling west
The hour of the imagined empire
The deepest hour of the darkest sea
The guilty hour that precedes catastrophe
The hour that it takes to go from here to there
The haunted hour of the knowledge of death
The hour in which the moon darkens
The hour that moves through the mind like cloud shadow
The blue hour that rests on the roof of the house
The hour that is the mother of minutes and grandmother of seconds
The swollen hour of pain, enough, enough
The hour when mice run in the walls
The bronze hour of electrical weather
The cloistered hour of the nun's great moment
The necklace of hours the widow wears
The numbing hours of a night in Nome
The sound of hours in the breathing of plants
The central hour that exists without you
The hour in which the universe begins to die
The hallucinatory hour that hangs forever
The hour of excess that equals two of self-examination
The hour that flashed on the skin
The hour of final music
The hour of painless solitude
The hour of moonlight upon her body

—Mark Strand

Nowhere had there been any acknowledgment that the life of a philanderer (if that was what Grant had to call himself—he who had not had half as many conquests as the man who had reproached him in his dream) involved acts of generosity, and even sacrifice. Many times he had catered to a woman's pride, to her fragility, by offering more affection—or a rougher passion—than anything he really felt. All so that he could now find himself accused of wounding and exploiting and destroying self-esteem. And of deceiving Fiona—as, of course, he had. But would it have been better if he had done as others had done with their wives, and left her? He had never thought of such a thing. He had never stopped making love to Fiona. He had not stayed away from her for a single night. No making up elaborate stories in order to spend a weekend in San Francisco or in a tent on Manitoulin Island. He had gone easy on the dope and the drink, and he had continued to publish papers, serve on committees, make progress in his career. He had never had any intention of throwing over work and marriage and taking to the country to practice carpentry or keep bees.

But something like that had happened, after all. He had taken early retirement with a reduced pension. Fiona's father had died, after some bewildered and stoical time alone in the big house, and Fiona had inherited both that property and the farmhouse where her father had grown up, in the country near Georgian Bay.

It was a new life. He and Fiona worked on the house. They got cross-country skis. They were not very sociable but they gradually made some friends. There were no more hectic flirtations. No bare female toes creeping up under a man's pants leg at a dinner party. No more loose wives.

Just in time, Grant was able to think, when the sense of injustice had worn down. The feminists and perhaps the sad silly girl herself and his cowardly so-called friends had pushed him out just in time. Out of a life that was in fact getting to be more trouble than it was worth. And that might eventually have cost him Fiona.

ON the morning of the day when he was to go back to Meadowlake, for the first visit, Grant woke early. He was full of a solemn tingling, as in the old days on the morning of his first planned meeting with a new woman. The feeling was not precisely sexual. (Later, when the meetings had become routine, that was all it was.) There was an expectation of discovery, almost a spiritual expansion. Also timidity, humility, alarm.

There had been a thaw. Plenty of snow was left, but the dazzling hard landscape of earlier winter had crumbled. These pocked heaps under a gray sky looked like refuse in the fields. In the town near Meadowlake he found a florist's shop and bought a large bouquet. He had never presented flowers to Fiona before. Or to anyone else. He entered the building feeling like a hopeless lover or a guilty husband in a cartoon.

"Wow. Narcissus this early," Kristy said. "You must've spent a fortune." She went along the hall ahead of him and snapped on the light in a sort of pantry, where she searched for a vase. She was a heavy young woman who looked as if she had given up on her looks in every department except her hair. That was blond and voluminous. All the puffed-up luxury of a cocktail waitress's style, or a stripper's, on top of such a workaday face and body.

"There now," she said, and nodded him down the hall. "Name's right on the door."

So it was, on a nameplate decorated with bluebirds. He wondered whether to knock, and did, then opened the door and called her name.

She wasn't there. The closet door was closed, the bed smoothed. Nothing on the bedside table, except a box of Kleenex and a glass of water. Not a single photograph or picture of any kind, not a book or a magazine. Perhaps you had to keep those in a cupboard.

He went back to the nurses' station. Kristy said, "No?" with a surprise that he thought perfunctory. He hesitated, holding the flowers. She said, "O.K., O.K.—let's set the bouquet down here." Sighing, as if he were a backward child on his first day at school, she led him down the hall toward a large central space with skylights which seemed to be a general meeting area. Some people were sitting along the walls, in easy chairs, others at tables in the middle of the carpeted floor. None of them looked too bad. Old—some of them incapacitated enough to need wheelchairs—but decent. There had been some unnerving sights when he and Fiona visited Mr. Farquhar. Whiskers on old women's chins, somebody with a bulged-out eye like a rotted plum. Dribblers, head wagglers, mad chatterers. Now it looked as if there'd been some weeding out of the worst cases.

"See?" said Kristy in a softer voice. "You just go up and say hello and try not to startle her. Just go ahead."

He saw Fiona in profile, sitting close up to one of the card tables, but not playing. She looked a little puffy in the face, the flab on one cheek hiding the corner of her mouth, in a way it hadn't done before. She was watching the play of the man she sat closest to. He held his cards tilted so that she could see them. When Grant got near the table she looked up. They all looked up—all the players at the table looked up, with displeasure. Then they immediately looked down at their cards, as if to ward off any intrusion.

But Fiona smiled her lopsided, abashed, sly, and charming smile and pushed back her chair and came round to him, putting her fingers to her mouth.

"Bridge," she whispered. "Deadly serious. They're quite rabid about it." She drew him toward the coffee table, chatting. "I can remember being like that for a while at college. My friends and I would cut class and sit in the common room and smoke and play like cutthroats. Can I get you anything? A cup of tea? I'm afraid the coffee isn't up to much here."

Grant never drank tea.

He could not throw his arms around her. Something about her voice and smile, familiar as they were, something about the way she seemed to be guarding the players from him—as well as

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AGAINST THE MASTER

You are vying for control
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superiority, you would:

a) Permanently cripple those who disappoint you
b) Feast on other people's discord
c) Respond poorly to criticism

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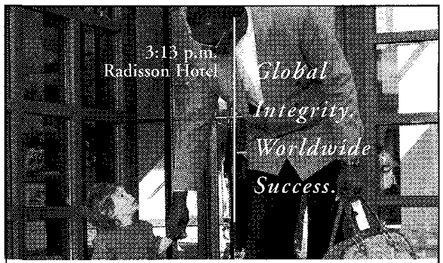
MACHIAVELLI DO?



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him from their displeasure—made that impossible.

"I brought you some flowers," he said. "I thought they'd do to brighten up your room. I went to your room but you weren't there."

"Well, no," she said. "I'm here." She glanced back at the table.

Grant said, "You've made a new friend." He nodded toward the man she'd been sitting next to. At this moment that man looked up at Fiona and she turned, either because of what Grant had said or because she felt the look at her back.

"It's just Aubrey," she said. "The funny thing is I knew him years and years ago. He worked in the store. The hardware store where my grandpa used to shop. He and I were always kidding around and he couldn't get up the nerve to ask me out. Till the very last weekend and he took me to a ballgame. But when it was over my grandpa showed up to drive me home. I was up visiting for the summer. Visiting my grandparents—they lived on a farm."

"Fiona. I know where your grandparents lived. It's where we live. Lived."

"Really?" she said, not paying her full attention because the cardplayer was sending her his look, which was one not of supplication but of command. He was a man of about Grant's age, or a little older. Thick coarse white hair fell over his forehead and his skin was leathery but pale, yellowish-white like an old wrinkled-up kid glove. His long face was dignified and melancholy and he had something of the beauty of a powerful, discouraged, elderly horse. But where Fiona was concerned he was not discouraged.

"I better go back," Fiona said, a blush spotting her newly fattened face. "He thinks he can't play without me sitting there. It's silly, I hardly know the game anymore. If I leave you now, you can entertain yourself? It must all seem strange to you but you'll be surprised how soon you get used to it. You'll get to know who everybody is. Except that some of them are pretty well off in the clouds, you know—you can't expect them all to get to know who you are."

She slipped back into her chair and said something into Aubrey's ear. She tapped her fingers across the back of his hand.

Grant went in search of Kristy and met her in the hall. She was pushing a cart with pitchers of apple juice and grape juice.

"Well?" she said.

Grant said, "Does she even know who I am?" He could not decide. She could have been playing a joke. It would not be unlike her. She had given herself away by that little pretense at the end, talking to him as if she thought perhaps he was a new resident. If it was a pretense.

Kristy said, "You just caught her at sort of a bad moment. Involved in the game."

"She's not even playing," he said.

"Well, but her friend's playing. Aubrey."

"So who is Aubrey?"

"That's who he is. Aubrey. Her friend. Would you like a juice?"

Grant shook his head.

"Oh look," said Kristy. "They get these attachments. That takes over for a while. Best buddy sort of thing. It's kind of a phase."

"You mean she really might not know who I am?"

"She might not. Not today. Then tomorrow—you never know, do you? You'll see the way it is, once you've been coming here for a while. You'll learn not to take it all so serious. Learn to take it day by day."

DAY by day. But things really didn't change back and forth and he didn't get used to the way they were. Fiona was the one who seemed to get used to him, but only as some persistent visitor who took a special interest in her. Or perhaps even as a nuisance who must be prevented, according to her old rules of courtesy, from realizing that he was one. She treated him with a distracted, social sort of kindness that was successful in keeping him from asking the most obvious, the most necessary question: did she remember him as her husband of nearly fifty years? He got the impression that she would be embarrassed by such a question—embarrassed not for herself but for him.

Kristy told him that Aubrey had been the local representative of a company that sold weed killer "and all that kind of stuff" to farmers. And then when he was not very old or even retired, she said, he had suffered some unusual kind of damage.

"His wife is the one takes care of

him, usually at home. She just put him in here on temporary care so she could get a break. Her sister wanted her to go to Florida. See, she's had a hard time, you wouldn't ever have expected a man like him—they just went on a holiday somewhere and he got something, like some bug that gave him a terrible high fever? And it put him in a coma and left him like he is now."

Most afternoons the pair could be found at the card table. Aubrey had large, thick-fingered hands. It was difficult for him to manage his cards. Fiona shuffled and dealt for him and sometimes moved quickly to straighten a card that seemed to be slipping from his grasp. Grant would watch from across the room her darting move and quick laughing apology. He could see Aubrey's husbandly frown as a wisp of her hair touched his cheek. Aubrey preferred to ignore her, as long as she stayed close.

But let her smile her greeting at Grant, let her push back her chair and get up to offer him tea—showing that she had accepted his right to be there—and Aubrey's face took on its look of sombre consternation. He would let the cards slide from his fingers and fall on the floor to spoil the game. And Fiona then had to get busy and put things right.

If Fiona and Aubrey weren't at the bridge table they might be walking along the halls, Aubrey hanging on to the railing with one hand and clutching Fiona's arm or shoulder with the other. The nurses thought that it was a marvel, the way she had got him out of his wheelchair. Though for longer trips—to the conservatory at one end of the building or the television room at the other—the wheelchair was called for.

In the conservatory, the pair would find themselves a seat among the most lush and thick and tropical-looking plants—a bower, if you liked. Grant stood nearby, on occasion, on the other side of the greenery, listening. Mixed in with the rustle of the leaves and the sound of plashing water was Fiona's soft talk and her laughter. Then some sort of chortle. Aubrey could talk, though his voice probably didn't sound as it used to. He seemed to say something now—a couple of thick syllables.

Take care. He's here. My love.

Grant made an effort, and cut his visits down to Wednesdays and Saturdays. Saturdays had a holiday bustle and tension. Families arrived in clusters. Mothers were usually in charge; they were the ones who kept the conversation afloat. Men seemed cowed, teenagers affronted. No children or grandchildren appeared to visit Aubrey, and since they could not play cards—the tables being taken over for ice-cream parties—he and Fiona stayed clear of the Saturday parade. The conservatory was far too popular then for any of their intimate conversations. Those might be going on, of course, behind Fiona's closed door. Grant could not manage to knock when he found it closed, though he stood there for some time staring at the Disney-style nameplate with an intense, a truly malignant dislike.

Or they might be in Aubrey's room. But he did not know where that was. The more he explored this place the more corridors and seating spaces and ramps he discovered, and in his wanderings he was still apt to get lost. One Saturday he looked out a window and saw Fiona—it had to be her—wheeling Aubrey along one of the paved paths now cleared of snow and ice. She was wearing a silly wool hat and a jacket with swirls of blue and purple, the sort of thing he had seen on local women at the supermarket. It must be that they didn't bother to sort out the wardrobes of the women who were roughly the same size and counted on the women not to recognize their own clothes anyway. They had cut her hair, too. They had cut away her angelic halo.

On a Wednesday, when everything was more normal and card games were going on again and the women in the Crafts Room were making silk flowers or costumed dolls—and when Aubrey and Fiona were again in evidence, so that it was possible for Grant to have one of his brief and friendly and maddening conversations with his wife—he said to her, "Why did they chop off your hair?"

Fiona put her hands up to her head, to check.

"Why—I never missed it," she said.

WHEN Grant had first started teaching Anglo-Saxon and Nordic literature he got the regular sort of students in his classes. But after a few years he noticed a change. Married women

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had started going back to school. Not with the idea of qualifying for a better job, or for any job, but simply to give themselves something more interesting to think about than their usual housework and hobbies. To enrich their lives. And perhaps it followed naturally that the men who taught them these things became part of the enrichment, that these men seemed to these women more mysterious and desirable than the men they still cooked for and slept with.

Those who signed up for Grant's courses might have a Scandinavian background or they might have learned something about Norse mythology from Wagner or historical novels. There were also a few who thought he was teaching a Celtic language and for whom everything Celtic had a mystic allure. He spoke to such aspirants fairly roughly from his side of the desk.

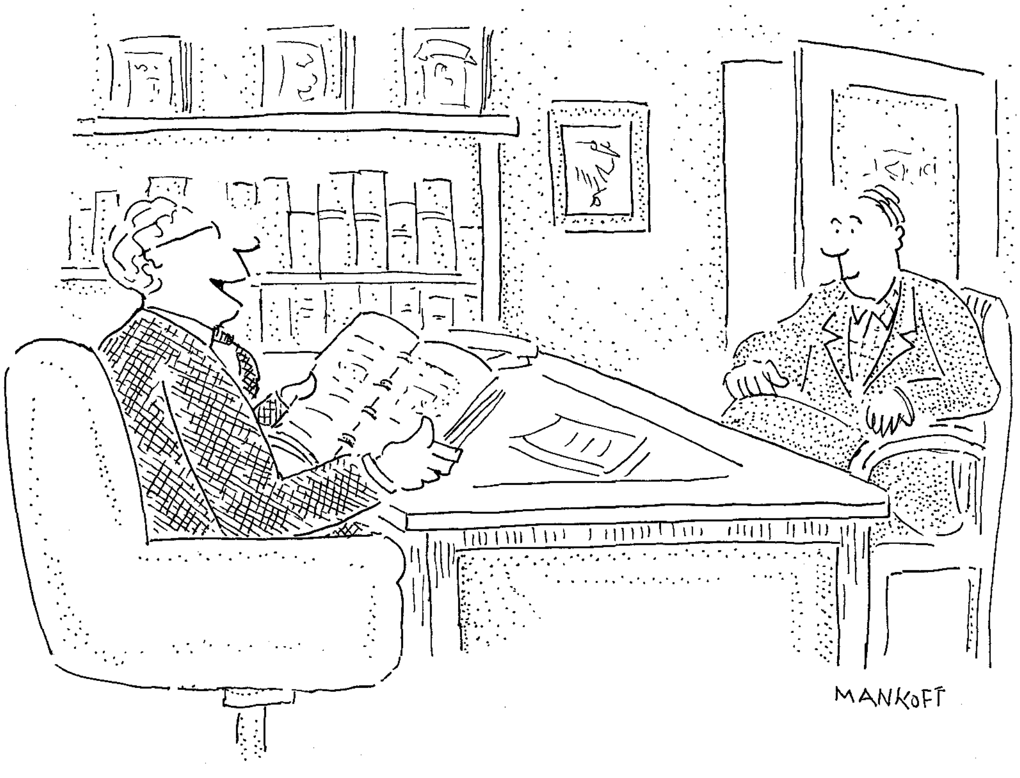
"If you want to learn a pretty language go and learn Spanish. Then you can use it if you go to Mexico."

Some took his warning and drifted away. Others seemed to be moved in a personal way by his demanding tone. They worked with a will and brought into his office, into his regulated satisfactory life, the great surprising bloom of their mature female compliance, their tremulous hope of approval.

He chose a woman named Jacqui Adams. She was the opposite of Fiona—short, cushiony, dark-eyed, effusive. A stranger to irony. The affair lasted for a year, until her husband was transferred. When they were saying goodbye in her car, she began to shake uncontrollably. It was as if she had hypothermia. She wrote to him a few times, but he found the tone of her letters overwrought and could not decide how to answer. He let the time for answering slip away while he became magically and unexpectedly involved with a girl who was young enough to be Jacqui's daughter.

For another and more dizzying development had taken place while he was busy with Jacqui. Young girls with long hair and sandalled feet were coming into his office and all but declaring themselves ready for sex. The cautious approaches, the tender intimations of feeling required with Jacqui were out the window. A whirlwind hit him, as it did many others. Scandals burst wide open, with high and painful drama all round but a feeling that somehow it was better so. There were reprisals; there were firings. But those fired went off to teach at smaller, more tolerant colleges or Open Learning Centers, and many wives left behind got over the shock and took up the costumes, the sexual nonchalance of the girls who had tempted their men. Academic parties, which used to be so predictable, became a minefield. An epidemic had broken out, it was spreading like the Spanish flu. Only this time people ran after contagion, and few between sixteen and sixty seemed willing to be left out.

That was exaggeration, of course. Fiona was quite willing. And Grant himself did not go overboard. What he felt was mainly a gigantic increase in well-being. A tendency to pudginess which he had had since he was twelve years old disappeared. He ran up steps two at a time. He appreciated as never before a pageant of torn clouds and winter sunsets seen from his office window, the charm of antique lamps glowing between his neighbors' living-room curtains, the cries of children in the park, at dusk, unwilling to leave the hill where they'd been tobogganing. Come summer, he learned the names of flowers. In his classroom, after being coached by his nearly voiceless mother-in-law (her affliction was cancer in the throat), he risked reciting the majestic and gory Icelandic ode, the Höfudlausn, composed to honor King Erik Bloodaxe by the skald whom that king had condemned to death.



"Funny, funny, funny, but we're going to pass on 'How to Drink and Drive.'"

Fiona had never learned Icelandic and she had never shown much respect for the stories that it preserved—the stories that Grant had taught and written about. She referred to their heroes as "old Njal" or "old Snorri." But in the last few years she had developed an interest in the country itself and looked at travel guides. She read about William Morris's trip, and Auden's. She didn't really plan to travel there. She said there ought to be one place you thought about and knew about and maybe longed for but never did get to see.

Nonetheless, the next time he went to Meadowlake, Grant brought Fiona a book he'd found of nineteenth-century watercolors made by a lady traveller to Iceland. It was a Wednesday. He went looking for her at the card tables but didn't see her. A woman called out to him, "She's not here. She's sick."

Her voice sounded self-important and excited—pleased with herself for having recognized him when he knew nothing about her. Perhaps also pleased with all she knew about Fiona, about Fiona's life here, thinking it was maybe more than he knew.

"He's not here, either," she added.

Grant went to find Kristy, who didn't have much time for him. She was talking to a weepy woman who looked like a first-time visitor.

"Nothing really," she said, when he asked what was the matter with Fiona. "She's just having a day in bed today, just a bit of an upset."

Fiona was sitting straight up in the bed. He hadn't noticed, the few times that he had been in this room, that this was a hospital bed and could be cranked up in such a way. She was wearing one of her high-necked maidenly gowns, and her face had a pallor that was like flour paste.

Aubrey was beside her in his wheelchair, pushed as close to the bed as he could get. Instead of the nondescript open-necked shirts he usually wore, he was wearing a jacket and tie. His natty-looking tweed hat was resting on the bed. He looked as if he had been out on important business.

Whatever he'd been doing, he looked worn out by it. He, too, was gray in the face.

They both looked up at Grant with a stony grief-ridden apprehension that turned to relief, if not to welcome, when they saw who he was. Not who they thought he'd be. They were hanging on to each other's hands and they did not let go.

The hat on the bed. The jacket and tie.

It wasn't that Aubrey had been out. It wasn't a question of where he'd been or whom he'd been to see. It was where he was going.

Grant set the book down on the bed beside Fiona's free hand.

"It's about Iceland," he said. "I thought maybe you'd like to look at it."

"Why, thank you," said Fiona. She didn't look at the book.

"Iceland," he said.

She said, "Ice-land." The first syllable managed to hold a tinkle of interest, but the second fell flat. Anyway, it was necessary for her to turn her attention back to Aubrey, who was pull-

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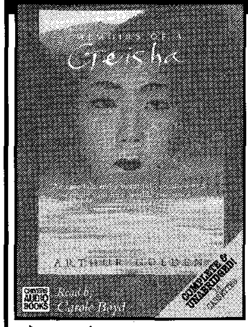

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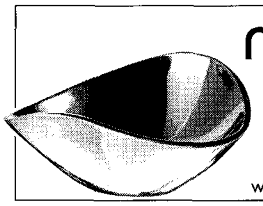

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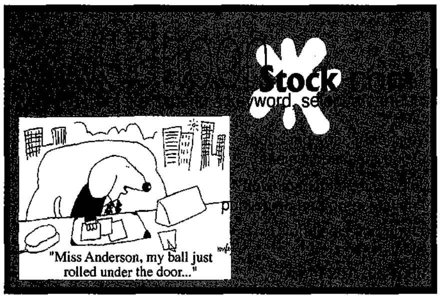
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ing his great thick hand out of hers.

"What is it?" she said. "What is it, dear heart?"

Grant had never heard her use this flowery expression before.

"Oh all right," she said. "Oh here." And she pulled a handful of tissues from the box beside her bed. Aubrey had begun to weep.

"Here. Here," she said, and he got hold of the Kleenex as well as he could and made a few awkward but lucky swipes at his face. While he was occupied, Fiona turned to Grant.

"Do you by any chance have any influence around here?" she said in a whisper. "I've seen you talking to them . . ."

Aubrey made a noise of protest or weariness or disgust. Then his upper body pitched forward as if he wanted to throw himself against her. She scrambled half out of bed and caught him and held on to him. It seemed improper for Grant to help her.

"Hush," Fiona was saying. "Oh, honey. Hush. We'll get to see each other. We'll have to. I'll go and see you. You'll come and see me."

Aubrey made the same sound again with his face in her chest and there was nothing Grant could decently do but get out of the room.

"I just wish his wife would hurry up and get here," Kristy said when he ran into her. "I wish she'd get him out of here and cut the agony short. We've got to start serving supper before long and how are we supposed to get her to swallow anything with him still hanging around?"

Grant said, "Should I stay?"

"What for? She's not sick, you know."

"To keep her company," he said.

Kristy shook her head.

"They have to get over these things on their own. They've got short memories, usually. That's not always so bad."

Grant left without going back to Fiona's room. He noticed that the wind was actually warm and the crows were making an uproar. In the parking lot a woman wearing a tartan pants suit was getting a folded-up wheelchair out of the trunk of her car.

FIONA did not get over her sorrow. She didn't eat at mealtimes, though she pretended to, hiding food in her napkin. She was being given a supplementary drink twice a day—someone stayed and watched while she swallowed it down. She got out of bed and dressed herself, but all she wanted to do then was sit in her room. She wouldn't have had any exercise at all if Kristy, or Grant during visiting hours, hadn't walked her up and down in the corridors or taken her outside. Weeping had left her eyes raw-edged and dim. Her cardigan—if it was hers—would be buttoned crookedly. She had not got to the stage of leaving her hair unbrushed or her nails uncleaned, but that might come soon. Kristy said that her muscles were deteriorating, and that if she didn't improve they would put her on a walker.

"But, you know, once they get a walker they start to depend on it and they never walk much anymore, just get wherever it is they have to go," she said to Grant. "You'll have to work at her harder. Try to encourage her."

But Grant had no luck at that. Fiona seemed to have taken a dislike to him, though she tried to cover it up. Perhaps she was reminded, every time she saw him, of her last minutes with Aubrey, when she had asked him for help and he hadn't helped her.

He didn't see much point in mentioning their marriage now.

The supervisor called him in to her office. She said that Fiona's weight was going down even with the supplement.

"The thing is, I'm sure you know, we don't do any prolonged bed care on the first floor. We do it temporarily if someone isn't feeling well, but if they get too weak to move around and be responsible we have to consider upstairs."

He said he didn't think that Fiona had been in bed that often.

"No. But if she can't keep up her strength she will be. Right now she's borderline."

Grant said that he had thought the second floor was for people whose minds were disturbed.

"That, too," she said.

THE street Grant found himself driving down was called Blackhawks Lane. The houses all looked to have been built around the same time, perhaps thirty or forty years ago. The street was wide and curving and there were no sidewalks. Friends of Grant and Fiona's had moved to places something like this when they began to have their children, and young families still lived here. There were basketball hoops over garage doors and tricycles in the driveways. Some of the houses had gone downhill. The yards were marked by tire tracks, the windows plastered with tinfoil or hung with faded flags. But a few seemed to have been kept up as well as possible by the people who had moved into them when they were new—people who hadn't had the money or perhaps hadn't felt the need to move on to some place better.

The house that was listed in the phone book as belonging to Aubrey and his wife was one of these. The front walk was paved with flagstones and bordered by hyacinths that stood as stiff as china flowers, alternately pink and blue.

He hadn't remembered anything about Aubrey's wife except the tartan suit he had seen her wearing in the parking lot. The tails of the jacket had flared open as she bent into the trunk of the car. He had got the impression of a trim waist and wide buttocks.

She was not wearing the tartan suit today. Brown belted slacks and a pink sweater. He was right about the waist—the tight belt showed she made a point of it. It might have been better if she didn't, since she bulged out considerably above and below.

She could be ten or twelve years younger than her husband. Her hair was short, curly, artificially reddened. She had blue eyes—a lighter blue than Fiona's—a flat robin's-egg or turquoise blue, slanted by a slight puffiness. And a good many wrinkles, made more noticeable by a walnut-stain makeup. Or perhaps that was her Florida tan.

He said that he didn't quite know how to introduce himself.

"I used to see your husband at Meadowlake. I'm a regular visitor there myself."

"Yes," said Aubrey's wife, with an aggressive movement of her chin.

"How is your husband doing?"

The "doing" was added on at the last moment.

"He's O.K.," she said.

"My wife and he struck up quite a close friendship."

"I heard about that."

"I wanted to talk to you about something if you had a minute."

"My husband did not try to start anything with your wife if that's what you're getting at," she said. "He did not molest her. He isn't capable of it and he wouldn't anyway. From what I heard it was the other way round."

Grant said, "No. That isn't it at all. I didn't come here with any complaints about anything."

"Oh," she said. "Well, I'm sorry. I thought you did. You better come in then. It's blowing cold in through the door. It's not as warm out today as it looks."

So it was something of a victory for him even to get inside.

She took him past the living room, saying, "We'll have to sit in the kitchen, where I can hear Aubrey."

Grant caught sight of two layers of front-window curtains, both blue, one sheer and one silky, a matching blue sofa and a daunting pale carpet, various bright mirrors and ornaments. Fiona had a word for those sort of swooping curtains—she said it like a joke, though the women she'd picked it up from used it seriously. Any room that Fiona fixed up was bare and bright. She would have deplored the crowding of all this fancy stuff into such a small space. From a room off the kitchen—a sort of sunroom, though the blinds were drawn against the afternoon brightness—he could hear the sounds of television.

The answer to Fiona's prayers sat a few feet away, watching what sounded like a ballgame. His wife looked in at him.

She said, "You O.K.?" and partly closed the door.

"You might as well have a cup of coffee," she said to Grant. "My son got him on the sports channel a year ago Christmas. I don't know what we'd do without it."

On the kitchen counters there were all sorts of contrivances and appliances—coffeemaker, food processor, knife sharpener, and some things Grant didn't know the names or uses of. All looked new and expensive, as if they had just been taken out of their wrappings, or were polished daily.

He thought it might be a good idea to admire things. He admired the coffeemaker she was using and said that he and Fiona had always meant to get one. This was absolutely untrue—Fiona had been devoted to a European contraption that made only two cups at a time.

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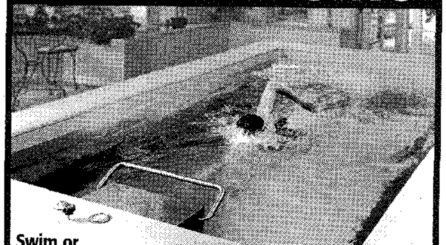

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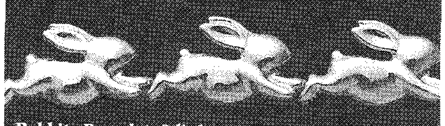

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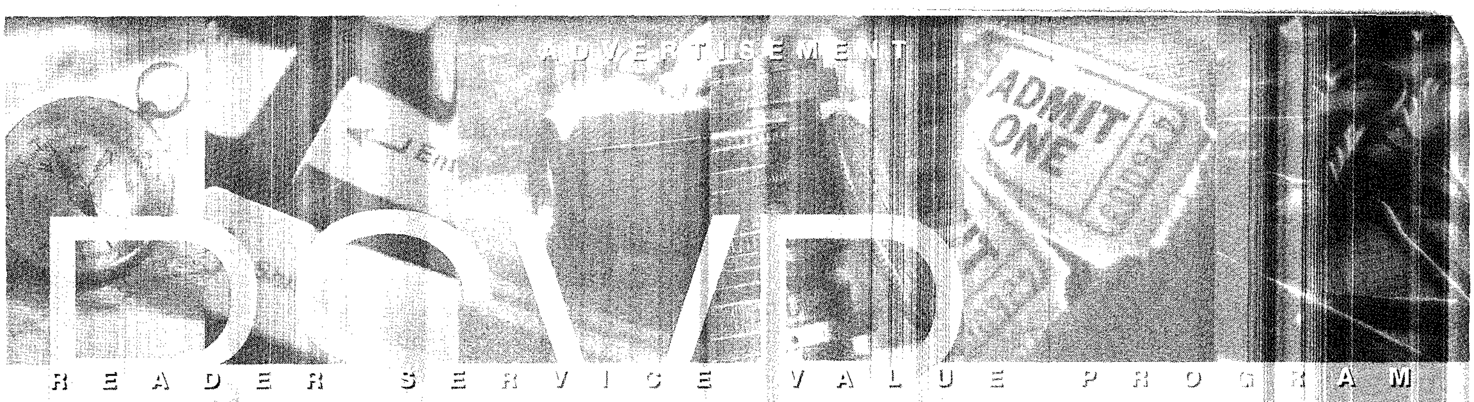

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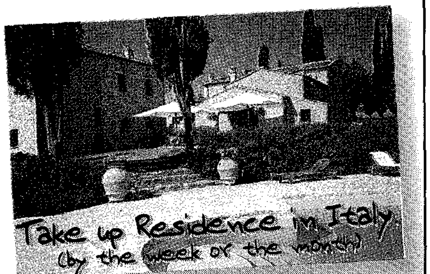

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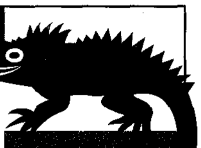

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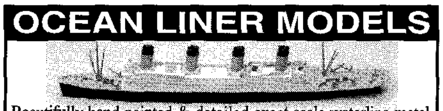

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son and his wife. They live in Kamloops. B.C. They send us more stuff than we can handle. It wouldn't hurt if they would spend the money to come and see us instead."

Grant said philosophically, "I suppose they're busy with their own lives."

"They weren't too busy to go to Hawaii last winter. You could understand it if we had somebody else in the family, closer at hand. But he's the only one."

She poured the coffee into two brown-and-green ceramic mugs that she took from the amputated branches of a ceramic tree trunk that sat on the table.

"People do get lonely," Grant said. He thought he saw his chance now. "If they're deprived of seeing somebody they care about, they do feel sad. Fiona, for instance. My wife."

"I thought you said you went and visited her."

"I do," he said. "That's not it."

Then he took the plunge, going on to make the request he'd come to make. Could she consider taking Aubrey back to Meadowlake, maybe just one day a week, for a visit? It was only a drive of a few miles. Or if she'd like to take the time off—Grant hadn't thought of this before and was rather dismayed to hear himself suggest it—then he himself could take Aubrey out there, he wouldn't mind at all. He was sure he could manage it. While he talked she moved her closed lips and her hidden tongue as if she were trying to identify some dubious flavor. She brought milk for his coffee and a plate of ginger cookies.

"Homemade," she said as she set the plate down. There was challenge rather than hospitality in her tone. She said nothing more until she had sat down, poured milk into her coffee, and stirred it.

Then she said no.

"No. I can't do that. And the reason is, I'm not going to upset him."

"Would it upset him?" Grant said earnestly.

"Yes, it would. It would. That's no way to do. Bringing him home and taking him back. That would just confuse him."

"But wouldn't he understand that it was just a visit? Wouldn't he get into the pattern of it?"

"He understands everything all right." She said this as if he had offered an insult to Aubrey. "But it's still an interruption. And then I've got to get him all ready and get him into the car, and he's a big man, he's not so easy to manage as you might think. I've got to maneuver him into the car and pack his chair and all that and what for? If I go to all that trouble I'd prefer to take him someplace that was more fun."

"But even if I agreed to do it?" Grant said, keeping his tone hopeful and reasonable. "It's true, you shouldn't have the trouble."

"You couldn't," she said flatly. "You don't know him. You couldn't handle him. He wouldn't stand for you doing for him. All that bother and what would he get out of it?"

Grant didn't think he should mention Fiona again.

"It'd make more sense to take him to the mall," she said. "Or now the lake boats are starting to run again, he might get a charge out of going and watching that."

She got up and fetched her cigarettes and lighter from the window above the sink.

"You smoke?" she said.

He said no, thanks, though he didn't know if a cigarette was being offered.

"Did you never? Or did you quit?"

"Quit," he said.

"How long ago was that?"

He thought about it.

"Thirty years. No—more."

He had decided to quit around the time he started up with Jacqui. But he couldn't remember whether he quit first, and thought a big reward was coming to him for quitting, or thought that the time had come to quit, now that he had such a powerful diversion.

"I've quit quitting," she said, lighting up. "Just made a resolution to quit quitting, that's all."

Maybe that was the reason for the wrinkles. Somebody—a woman—had told him that women who smoked developed a special set of fine facial wrinkles. But it could have been from the sun, or just the nature of her skin—her neck was noticeably wrinkled as well. Wrinkled neck, youthfully full and uptilted breasts. Women of her age usually had these contradictions. The bad and good points, the genetic luck or lack of it, all mixed up together. Very few kept their beauty whole, though shadowy, as Fiona had done. And perhaps that wasn’t even true. Perhaps he only thought that because he’d known Fiona when she was young. When Aubrey looked at his wife did he see a high-school girl full of scorn and sass, with a tilt to her blue eyes, pursing her fruity lips around a forbidden cigarette?

“So your wife’s depressed?” Aubrey’s wife said. “What’s your wife’s name? I forget.”

“It’s Fiona.”

“Fiona. And what’s yours? I don’t think I was ever told that.”

Grant said, “It’s Grant.”

She stuck her hand out unexpectedly across the table.

“Hello, Grant. I’m Marian.”

“So now we know each other’s names,” she said, “there’s no point in not telling you straight out what I think. I don’t know if he’s still so stuck on seeing your—on seeing Fiona. Or not. I don’t ask him and he’s not telling me. Maybe just a passing fancy. But I don’t feel like taking him back there in case it turns out to be more than that. I can’t afford to risk it. I don’t want him upset and carrying on. I’ve got my hands full with him as it is. I don’t have any help. It’s just me here. I’m it.”

“Did you ever consider—I’m sure it’s very hard for you—” Grant said. “Did you ever consider his going in there for good?”

He had lowered his voice almost to a whisper but she did not seem to feel a need to lower hers.

“No,” she said. “I’m keeping him right here.”

Grant said, “Well. That’s very good and noble of you.” He hoped the word “noble” had not sounded sarcastic. He had not meant it to be.

“You think so?” she said. “Noble is not what I’m thinking about.”

“Still. It’s not easy.”

“No, it isn’t. But the way I am, I don’t have much choice. I don’t have the money to put him in there unless I sell the house. The house is what we own outright. Otherwise I don’t have anything in the way of resources. Next year I’ll have his pension and my pension, but even so I couldn’t afford to keep him there and hang on to the house. And it means a lot to me, my house does.”

“It’s very nice,” said Grant.

“Well, it’s all right. I put a lot into it. Fixing it up and keeping it up. I don’t want to lose it.”

“No. I see your point.”

“The company left us high and dry,” she said. “I don’t know all the ins and outs of it but basically he got shoved out. It ended up with them saying he owed them money and when I tried to find out what was what he just went on saying it’s none of my business. What I think is he did something pretty stupid. But I’m not supposed to ask so I shut up. You’ve been married. You are married. You know how it is. And in the middle of me finding out about this we’re supposed to go on this trip and can’t get out of it. And on the trip he takes sick from this virus you never heard of and goes into a coma. So that pretty well gets him off the hook.”

Grant said, “Bad luck.”

“I don’t mean he got sick on purpose. It just happened. He’s not mad at me anymore and I’m not mad at him. It’s just life. You can’t beat life.”

She flicked her tongue in a cat’s businesslike way across her top lip, getting the cookie crumbs. “I sound like I’m quite the philosopher, don’t I? They told me out there you used to be a university professor.”

“Quite a while ago,” Grant said.

“I bet I know what you’re thinking,” she said. “You’re thinking there’s a mercenary type of a person.”

“I’m not making judgments of that sort. It’s your life.”

“You bet it is.”

He thought they should end on a more neutral note. So he asked her if her husband had worked in a hardware store in the summers, when he was going to school.

“I never heard about it,” she said. “I wasn’t raised here.”

GRANT realized he’d failed with Aubrey’s wife. Marian. He had thought that what he’d have to contend with would be a woman’s natural sexual jealousy—or her resentment, the stubborn remains of sexual jealousy. He had not had any idea of the way she might be looking at things. And yet in some depressing way the conversation had not been unfamiliar to him. That was because it reminded him of conversations he’d had with people in his own family. His relatives, probably even his mother, had thought the way Mar-

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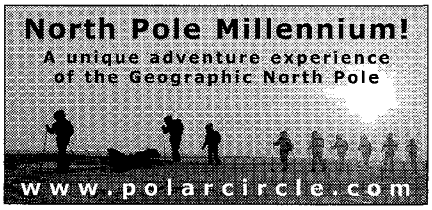
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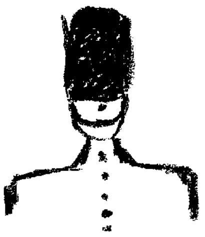
ian thought. Money first. They had believed that when other people did not think that way it was because they had lost touch with reality. That was how Marian would see him, certainly. A silly person, full of boring knowledge and protected by some fluke from the truth about life. A person who didn't have to worry about holding on to his house and could go around dreaming up the fine generous schemes that he believed would make another person happy. What a jerk, she would be thinking now.

Being up against a person like that made him feel hopeless, exasperated, finally almost desolate. Why? Because he couldn't be sure of holding on to himself, against people like that? Because he was afraid that in the end they were right? Yet he might have married her. Or some girl like that. If he'd stayed back where he belonged. She'd have been appetizing enough. Probably a flirt. The fussy way she had of shifting her buttocks on the kitchen chair, her pursed mouth, a slightly contrived air of menace—that was what was left of the more or less innocent vulgarity of a small-town flirt.

She must have had some hopes when she picked Aubrey. His good looks, his salesman's job, his white-collar expectations. She must have believed that she would end up better off than she was now. And so it often happened with those practical people. In spite of their calculations, their survival instincts, they might not get as far as they had quite reasonably expected. No doubt it seemed unfair.

IN the kitchen the first thing he saw was the light blinking on his answering machine. He thought the same thing he always thought now. Fiona. He pressed the button before he took his coat off.



"Hello, Grant. I hope I got the right person. I just thought of something. There is a dance here in town at the Legion supposed to be for singles on Saturday night and I am on the lunch committee, which means I can bring a free guest. So I wondered whether you would happen to be interested in that? Call me back when you get a chance."

A woman's voice gave a local number. Then there was a beep and the same voice started talking again.

"I just realized I'd forgotten to say who it was. Well, you probably recognized the voice. It's Marian. I'm still not so used to these machines. And I wanted to say I realize you're not a single and I don't mean it that way. I'm not either, but it doesn't hurt to get out once in a while. If you are interested you can call me and if you are not you don't need to bother. I just thought you might like the chance to get out. It's Marian speaking. I guess I already said that. O.K. then. Goodbye."

Her voice on the machine was different from the voice he'd heard a short time ago in her house. Just a little different in the first message, more so in the second. A tremor of nerves there, an affected nonchalance, a hurry to get through and a reluctance to let go.

Something had happened to her. But when had it happened? If it had been immediate, she had concealed it very successfully all the time he was with her. More likely it came on her gradually, maybe after he'd gone away. Not necessarily as a blow of attraction. Just the realization that he was a possibility, a man on his own. More or less on his own. A possibility that she might as well try to follow up.

But she'd had the jitters when she made the first move. She had put herself at risk. How much of herself he could not yet tell. Generally a woman's vulnerability increased as time went on, as things progressed. All you could tell at the start was that if there was an edge of it then, there'd be more later. It gave him a satisfaction—why deny it?—to have brought that out in her. To have roused something like a shimmer, a blurring, on the surface of her personality. To have heard in her testy broad vowels this faint plea.

He set out the eggs and mushrooms to make himself an omelette. Then he thought he might as well pour a drink.

Anything was possible. Was that true—was anything possible? For instance, if he wanted to, would he be able to break her down, get her to the point where she might listen to him about taking Aubrey back to Fiona? And not just for visits but for the rest of Aubrey's life. And what would become of him and Marian after he'd delivered Aubrey to Fiona?

Marian would be sitting in her house now, waiting for him to call. Or probably not sitting. Doing things to keep herself busy. She might have fed Aubrey while Grant was buying the mushrooms and driving home. She might now be preparing him for bed. But all the time she would be conscious of the phone, of the silence of the phone. Maybe she would have calculated how long it would take Grant to drive home. His address in the phone book would have given her a rough idea of where he lived. She would calculate how long, then add to that the time it might take him to shop for supper (figuring that a man alone would shop every day). Then a certain amount of time for him to get around to listening to his messages. And as the silence persisted she'd think of other things. Other errands he might have had to do before he got home. Or perhaps a dinner out, a meeting that meant he would not get home at suppertime at all.

What conceit on his part. She was above all things a sensible woman. She would go to bed at her regular time thinking that he didn't look as if he'd be a decent dancer anyway. Too stiff, too professorial.

He stayed near the phone, looking at magazines, but he didn't pick it up when it rang again.

"Grant. This is Marian. I was down in the basement putting the wash in the dryer and I heard the phone and when I got upstairs whoever it was had hung up. So I just thought I ought to say I was here. If it was you and if you are even home. Because I don't have a machine, obviously, so you couldn't leave a message. So I just wanted. To let you know." The time was now twenty-five after ten.

"Bye."

He would say that he'd just got home. There was no point in bringing to her mind the picture of his sitting here weighing the pros and cons.

Drapes. That would be her word for the blue curtains—drapes. And why not? He thought of the ginger cookies so perfectly round that she had to announce they were homemade, the ceramic coffee mugs on their ceramic tree, a plastic runner, he was sure, protecting the hall carpet. A high-gloss exactness and practicality that his mother had never achieved but would have admired—was that why he could feel this twinge of bizarre and unreliable affection? Or was it because he'd had two more drinks after the first?

The walnut-stain tan—he believed now that it was a tan—of her face and neck would most likely continue into her cleavage, which would be deep, crêpey-skinned, odorous and hot. He had that to think of as he dialled the number that he had already written down. That and the practical sensuality of her cat's tongue. Her gemstone eyes.

FIONA was in her room but not in bed. She was sitting by the open window, wearing a seasonable but oddly short and bright dress. Through the window came a heady warm blast of lilacs in bloom and the spring manure spread over the fields.

She had a book open in her lap.

She said, "Look at this beautiful book I found. It's about Iceland. You wouldn't think they'd leave valuable books lying around in the rooms. But I think they've got the clothes mixed up—I never wear yellow."

"Fiona," he said.

"Are we all checked out now?" she said. He thought the brightness of her voice was wavering a little. "You've been gone a long time."

"Fiona, I've brought a surprise for you. Do you remember Aubrey?"

She stared at Grant for a moment, as if waves of wind had come beating into her face. Into her face, into her head, pulling everything to rags. All rags and loose threads.

"Names elude me," she said harshly.

Then the look passed away as she retrieved, with an effort, some bantering grace. She set the book down carefully and stood up and lifted her arms to put them around him. Her skin or her breath gave off a faint new smell, a smell that seemed to Grant like green stems in rank water.

"I'm happy to see you," she said, both sweetly and formally. She pinched his earlobes, hard.

"You could have just driven away," she said. "Just driven away without a care in the world and forsook me. Forsooken me. Forsaken."

He kept his face against her white hair, her pink scalp, her sweetly shaped skull.

He said, "Not a chance." ♦

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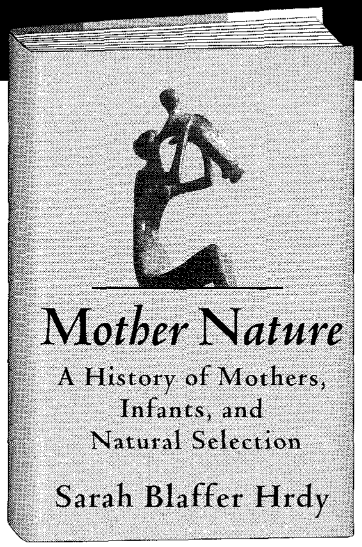

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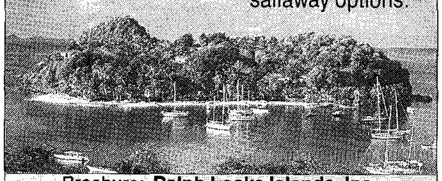

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THE CRITICS

THE CURRENT CINEMA

KILLING TIME

From Mr. Ripley to Gilbert and Sullivan.

BY ANTHONY LANE

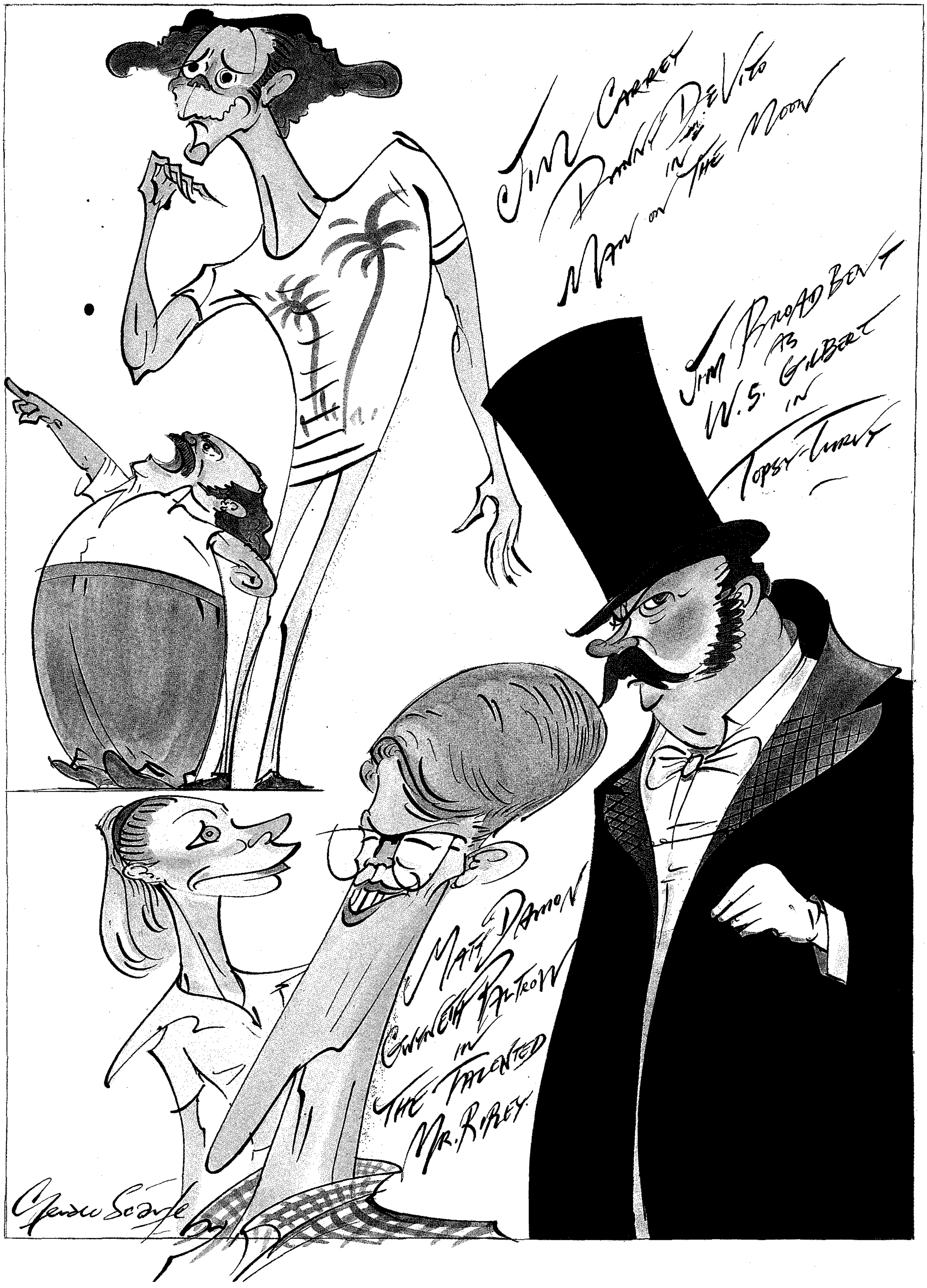
If your last movie was “The English Patient,” what do you do next? When half of your previous characters tended patiently to the pains of the dying, how do you snap out of it? Easy. You make a movie in which death is as swift, and as easily settled, as a hotel bill. And so Anthony Minghella has found his way into “The Talented Mr. Ripley.” He has adapted Patricia Highsmith’s novel, whose perfume of disdain has barely dispelled since it was first published in 1955, and nudged the action forward a few years, toward the randy finale of the fifties—closer to the Fellini of “La Dolce Vita,” say, than to the wasp-waisted primness of “Roman Holiday.” There is almost no sex in Minghella’s film, but there is hardly a scene that doesn’t crackle with small jolts of desire or—this being Highsmith—with revulsion. What is it, after all, that sends Tom Ripley (Matt Damon) from New York to Italy, in search of Dickie Greenleaf (Jude Law)? Nominally, it is Dickie’s father, Herbert (James Rebhorn), who needs to reclaim his prodigal son; Dickie is wasting his time and his Princeton education under the sun, in the company of a mystery blonde who goes by the unmysterious name of Marge (Gwyneth Paltrow). In truth, however, the good Mr. Greenleaf simply provides Tom with the excuse (plus the lavish expenses) to stretch his limbs and his elastic morality in the service of an ideal; Ripley wants to flee America, not to mention the person that America took him for, and to establish precisely how *dolce* the *vita* can get.

He is not the first pilgrim to tread this path. In the Highsmith novel, Mr. Greenleaf suggests that Tom read “The Ambassadors” before leaving on his trip, and it would not be fanciful to construe both book and film as the last gasps of the Jamesian experiment; when Minghella shows a classical bust doubling as an offensive weapon, the joke hits home. Lambert Strether was shocked to see his young charge out boating with a married woman, but that’s nothing; on *his* boat trip, Tom beats Dickie to a pulp, and spends the rest of the story assuming the identity of his victim, down to the rings on his fingers. He must outwit not just the Italian police but the suspicions of Marge; he must maintain a dexterous intimacy with Meredith Logue (Cate Blanchett), who thought he was Dickie from the beginning; he must fend off the brutish inquiries of Freddie (Philip Seymour Hoffman); he must consort with Peter (Jack Davenport) but not come too close; above all, he must not go mad.

Crackup haunts this picture, right from the frame-slicing credits at the start. It is there in the maniacal leaps of musical mood; Minghella hurries us from Chet Baker to Bach like someone spinning the dial on a radio. And you see it in the twitchy, bespectacled features of Matt Damon, as he fights to overcome his own solidity; despite the cheek of his enormous smile, Damon basically carries and conducts himself like a regular guy (which is why Spielberg recruited him for Private Ryan), and he can no more slither into perversity than he could enjoy a night out in women’s clothing. The intellectual hauteur of Ripley, who was a murderous Europhiliac snob when Dr. Lecter was still in med school, is planted in the sight of Tom reading Shakespeare or musing on the Forum at dusk, like Gibbon on the brink of a big idea; all the same, I see no calculation in Damon’s eyes. I think “The Talented Mr. Ripley” is a struggle for him, if an intriguing one; the movie becomes the tale of a man looking for that talent, not using it. Damon’s Ripley is more nervous neophyte than sociopathic pro; he kills Dickie in a taunted panic, and Minghella is careful to scotch any murmur of premeditation. What we get is a lush psychological thriller—a nineties take on Highsmith’s novel, which was a philosophical handbook for vacant spirits. When Alain Delon played Ripley in “Plein Soleil,” the 1960 adaptation of the same work, his coolness was like a dazzling offshoot of Sartre; Damon, by comparison, is a bright boy on a dangerous dare—Bad Will Hunting.

In homage to the Highsmith principle that our personalities are as slippery as eels, I would like to see “The Talented Mr. Ripley” reshot with the

GERALD SCARFE



JIM CARREY
DANNY DEVITO
IN
MAN ON THE MOON
JIM BROADBENT
AS
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IN
TOPSY-TURVY
MATT DAMON
GWYNETH PALTROW
IN
THE TALENTED
MR. RIPLEY
Gerald Scarfe

male leads reversed. Matt Damon could be the simple, unbookish Dickie, and Jude Law—the only current movie star handsome enough to have swung it as a heartthrob in the Hollywood of old—would be Ripley. Law is so bronzed and strolling, with his linen pants and his flattish porkpie hat stolen from the cover of "Come Fly with Me," that poor, poky Gwyneth Paltrow never really gets a grip on him; he seduces both men and women without even bothering to seduce them, all of which would be perfect for Ripley's lascivious horror of boredom. Highsmith was turned on by same-sex relations, and openly scornful of female characters, such as Marge, who were drab enough to love one man; the prototype for Ripley was Bruno in "Strangers on a Train," immortalized by Robert Walker in Hitchcock's film. Walker would have eaten Matt Damon alive, with a light dressing of virgin oil, but Jude Law might have given him pause—Bruno might have recognized a fellow-devil. That we could be as promiscuous with our souls as with our bodies was the guiding light of the Ripley books, and Minghella is perhaps too generous a romantic, too much the connoisseur of human sympathies, to embrace so chilling a proposal. The Italy of the novel felt rocky and crumbling, and you didn't want to be there while Ripley was around; the Italy of the film laps at you like warm waves, and you never want to leave.

In short, Anthony Minghella does a Jude Law on us. He lays siege to our sensibilities with jazz clubs, espresso machines, sidesaddle Vespa rides, and the Grand Canal; he glances at one man sitting on another man's knee and tying his tie, while the two of them glance at a passing girl; he dreams up the Cate Blanchett figure—far more alluring than the moaning Marge—and puts her in powder-blue coats and soft cream berets. He gives her a wonderful speech about having enough money to despise money, which cuts to the quick of the Ripley dream; at the end, she even reaches for a kiss from Tom himself, and makes you believe that he likes it. The movie is more cunningly planned than any of the crimes on display; you can't help yielding to the tranquil, slightly stoned gaze that it turns upon the world. At one point, the camera stalks slowly behind Tom as he approaches Marge; she has got hold of an incriminating clue, and he has an open razor in the pocket of his robe. There is a shudder of strings on the soundtrack, but what they snare you with is not so much fright as a succulent unease; we are lost in a Mediterranean "Vertigo." Thank goodness for Philip Seymour Hoffman, who keeps his certainties while all around are losing theirs. He knocks back each of his scenes like a double brandy: "How's the peeping?" he yells from the stern of a yacht to Matt Damon, who is trying not to pry into sex belowdecks. The answer is that the peeping is just fine; I guess I miss the deep rot of Tom Ripley, but his beating of the odds remains as enviable as his unearned income, and the talented Mr. Minghella has forced us to confess, once again, that we like to watch.

SOME people consider Jodie Foster too clever by half: a tight-lipped smarty-pants, with distinct traces of shrew. That's what I like best about her. When she goes out on a limb, as she does in "Nell," I feel embarrassed for her; when I realized, on the other hand, that her new role, in "Anna and the King," would require her to wear corsets, a hoop skirt, and a hairnet, I was overjoyed. It couldn't happen to a better woman.

The Anna in question is Mrs. Leonowens, a tough British widow who arrives in Siam in 1862 to oversee the education of the royal household's fifty-eight children, "and ten more on the way," as the fertile father, King Mongkut (Chow Yun-Fat), proclaims. Anna's other duties, it transpires, are to save the kingdom from marauding Burmese, play a little croquet, and make His Majesty sort of fall in love with her. (That's about right for Foster: she is never more than semi-lovable, and watchful of her own yearnings in return.) We have been here before, notably in "The King and I"; the new film is meant to rub historical grit into that silken myth, but the director, Andy Tennant (who re-robed the Cinderella story in "Ever After"), conjures up a musty, rustling magnificence that still reeks of fable. The result is much too long, but it works surprisingly well; one has almost forgotten the pleasures of the grand, unironic romance. Foster and Chow circle each other in a quizzical dance; he seems genuinely amused by his weakness for this Westerner. It must have taken a superhuman effort to step into the shoes of Yul Brynner, mainly because Yul rarely wore any; he wore an ankle bracelet and the mile-wide grin of a man who has spent the afternoon sorting out his concubine collection. How could Chow top that? With hair, for one thing, slicked back with Thai gel, plus a dab of nifty swordplay. Even Mongkut, however, is no match for Anna; by the end, like all the Siamese, he turns into a total pussycat. ♦

UNDER THE LIGHTS

BY DAVID DENBY

IF the underlying message of every comic is "Love me," the message of Andy Kaufman, the media surrealist who died in 1984, was "Hate me, but then love me." Kaufman would stand in silence before an audience, his eyelids held wide open as if by pins, his pupils darting wildly, panic sweat breaking out on his forehead. Why wouldn't he speak? With his dark hair slicked down, he looked like a doleful matador who had lost his sword. Kaufman did more than reverse the glib self-assurance of most comics; he was capable of bringing the act of performing to the edge of metaphysical uncertainty. Again and again, he dissolved the bond of mutual good will between entertainer and audience, something never attempted by, say, Don Rickles, who, for all his snarls, was actually a lovable traditionalist—a nasty pet with an extra tooth or two. But Kaufman came on as if he had no teeth at all, soft as a babykins, and then did weird, hostile things. He created situations, embarrassing everyone; he made "dead air" alive with arrogant provocation—reading to the audience, for instance, or playing a record, or drinking water and smiling nervously.

It is now fashionable to speak of him as a comic "genius," but I'm hardly the only one in the world who found his experiments more strange than funny. It often wasn't clear what he was parodying, or what the joke was. You couldn't identify a satirical idea worth a damn in such exhausting pranks as his wrestling bouts with women. Kaufman specialized in show-business Dada, a subversion of show business from deep within it, and if you didn't take TV comedy all that seriously to begin with he didn't do much for you. As he broke the rules, his intentions receded into a mysterious antechamber of perversity; the routines themselves inhabited some region between happenings and madness.

In Milos Forman's "Man on the Moon," Jim Carrey gives a brilliant physical performance as Kaufman. He's more volatile than the actual Andy Kaufman, bigger, more threatening, more thoroughly lost in craziness. He gets the infantile grandiosity, the taunting ironic schmuckiness that dared anyone to take offense. He reanimates and improves the famous routines; he pays homage to Kaufman and outdoes him in the same breath. But "Man on the Moon" isn't a satisfying movie, and, given the way it was conceived, it couldn't have been. Forman's screenwriters, Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski (the same pair who wrote Forman's "The People vs. Larry Flynt"), put together brief scenes of Kaufman as a child, and some glimpses of his puzzled parents. They sketch in his relations with his manager (Danny DeVito), his girlfriend (Courtney Love), and his collaborator and spiritual brother, Bob Zmuda (Paul Giamatti). But the moviemakers' intention is not to illuminate Kaufman; their intention is to enshrine him as a pure performer and beautiful nut case. They have defined their honor in such a way that they are forced to re-create with us, the movie audience, the same hostile relation that Kaufman fell into with his night-club or TV-studio audience. This Kaufman is exactly the same offstage and on. He does more than hold his character; he's all surface and tricks, all wild-monkey craziness, and he shatters every reality but his own. And so we are intimidated out of asking such obvious questions as "Is he calculating and shrewd or just unconscious—a semi-psychotic set loose in the media?" Our desire to understand him is thrown back at us as if it were some sort of existential weakness. But if Forman & Co. wanted to do nothing more than shine lights off Kaufman's impenetrable surface, then why make a movie? Why not anthologize his best moments from "Saturday Night Live"? Even if we enjoy being mucked around with, we may feel that "Man on the Moon" is a cheat, and pointless, too. Is one-upping the audience what really matters in filmmaking?

Milos Forman is a talented man, yet some part of him has never left the sixties and never will. Again and again, in such movies as "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," "Hair," "Amadeus," and "The People vs. Larry Flynt," Forman has searched for the one pure rebel, the one totally uncompromised hero. He drops most of the specific cultural background out of his movies and instead tells his favorite story: there is a man, a Genius, who is misunderstood; he has enemies; he is necessarily self-destructive and childish; he triumphs, but at great personal cost. Forman is a middlebrow sentimentalizer of the artist figure, and "Man on the Moon" brings his quest to a strange end. The one pure rebel, it turns out, isn't a lonely hero; he isn't a person at all.

Mike Leigh's "Topsy-Turvy" revisits, with excited admiration and free-ranging intelligence, the most famous partnership in the British theatre—the collaboration of W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan in the glory days of imperial rule. There are elements here of a traditional bio-pic—failure, triumph, intimations of immortality—but none of the stodginess and self-congratulation that usually plague the form. It's 1884 as the movie begins, and the great duo are at a low ebb. Sir Arthur Sullivan (Allan Corduner), suffering from kidney stones, hauls himself out of bed to conduct the successful première of "Princess Ida," but "Ida" runs into a heat wave, and the audience fades away. As a young man, Sullivan wrote oratorios—he longed to be the English Mendelssohn—and by now he's bored with the successful trifles he has produced with the librettist Gilbert (Jim Broadbent) and sick of the overbearing Gil-

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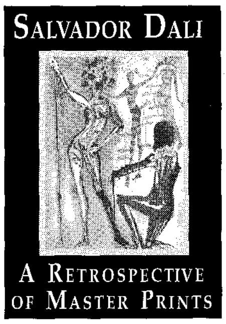

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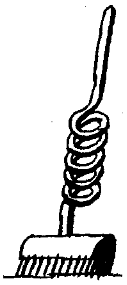
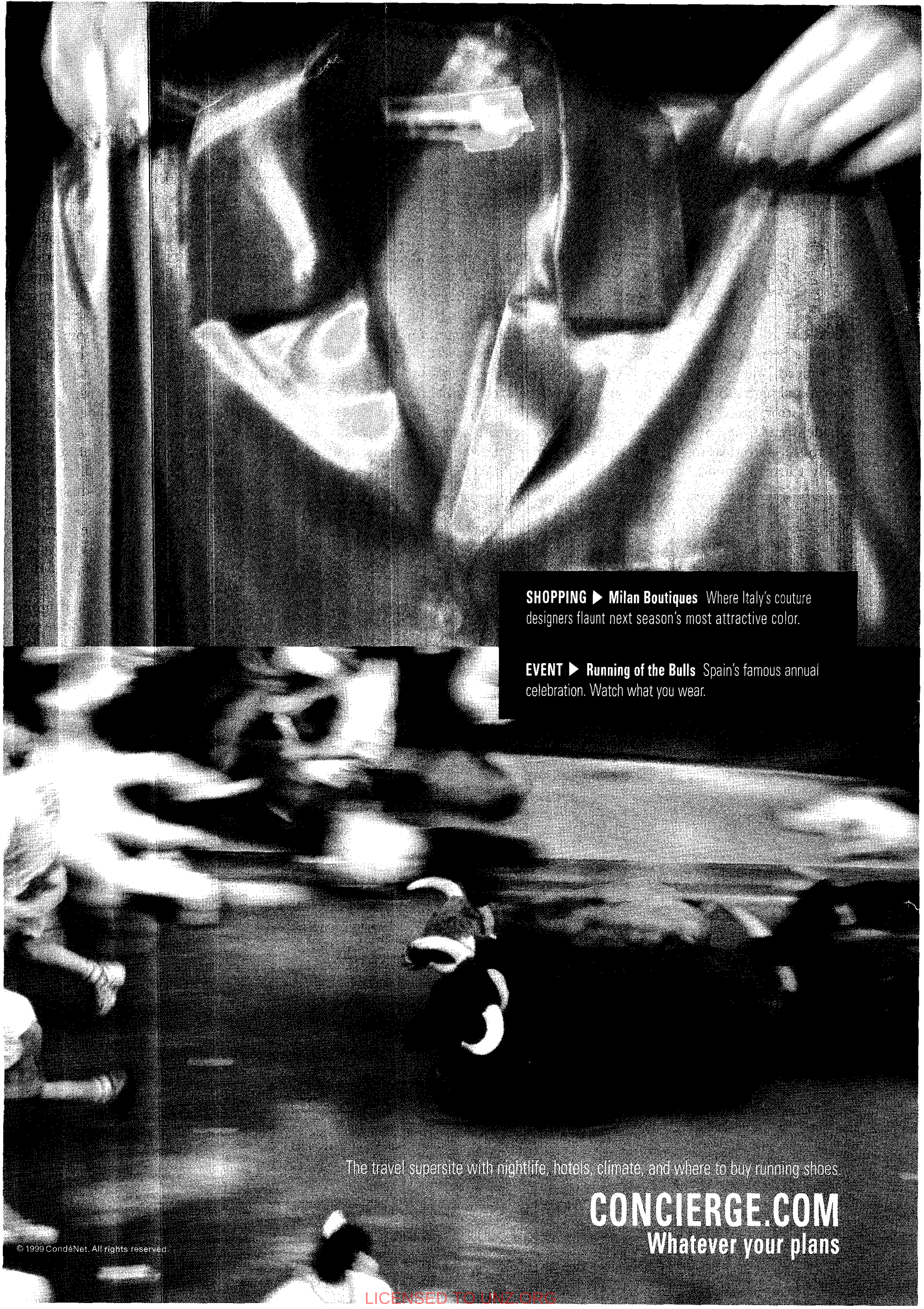
bert himself. The two men are so dissimilar in temperament that they can hardly endure each other's company: Sullivan, with a helpless smile of pleasure, idles with French whores and his swank American mistress (Eleanor David), yet harbors the grandest ambitions for himself. (He may have undervalued his gift for sweet, simple melodies.) Gilbert, irascible and asexual, as proper and untouchable as Gladstone himself, speaks in biting sentences that seem to leave no room for disagreement. Yet the sour Gilbert is the theatrical pro, filled with respect for the hard work of truly entertaining an audience. He has fewer pretensions than Sullivan, but he may have been the greater artist: his magical-transformation farce plots and his rhyming lyrics, with their wondrous syllabic precision, have sent clever young men and women into tizzies for more than a hundred years. Gilbert and Sullivan! The very names sum up an entire lost era of educated Anglo-American frivolousness. "Topsy-Turvy" rediscovers the source of the pleasure.



In London, Gilbert's wife drags him to an exhibition of Japanese culture. Jim Broadbent's gleam of apprehension—the "Eureka!" moment when he thinks of writing "The Mikado"—is the one clichéd element in the movie. But, once Gilbert gets to work, and enlists the reluctant Sullivan in the project, "Topsy-Turvy" becomes an extraordinary portrait of how something of lasting value is made. The process of creation is a perfect subject for Mike Leigh, because he's obsessed with it in his own work. The director of "High Hopes," "Naked," "Secrets and Lies," and "Career Girls" has developed what is probably the most successful "organic" method of working since Ingmar Bergman's: he immerses the actors in their roles, developing situations and lines through their interactions, and only then, drawing on this incubation period, which may last several months, does he write and shoot the movie. The results feel rough-edged and free-swinging but not blurry and redundant, in the Cassavetes style of improvisation. "The Mikado," of course, was thoroughly written out, not shaped in collaboration with actors, but, when Leigh's loosening method is applied to the creation of this Gilbert and Sullivan opera, the director's spontaneity and warmth light up the facets of something diamond-hard.

To modern eyes, the formal manners of the Victorian period offer unparallelled comic and dramatic opportunities: any departure from perfect politeness instantly registers as a slight or as a sudden accession of feeling. Gilbert rehearses his cast in a morning coat and top hat; he puts off his sexually needy wife with compliments and keeps his mad father at a distance. Bluff and hectoring, incapable of uttering a sentence without wit, he hides behind syntax as behind an oak door. But the unhappiness of an eccentric misanthrope and the passion for theatre, too, emerge in the tiny pauses and inflections inserted into his balanced clauses. The massive and melancholy Jim Broadbent has an iron-heavy voice that nevertheless moves as quickly as a lithe animal. By contrast, Sullivan's scenes with his American mistress have a slow, wandering pulse—suddenly, we feel we are dallying in a gazebo on a summer's day. Leigh's point is clear enough: the combination of incisiveness and tender languor is what produces the art of "H.M.S. Pinafore" and "The Pirates of Penzance."

The rehearsal scenes are devoted to minute detail—how to sing triplets with the right springing rhythm, how Japanese ladies without corsets should advance across the stage, and so on. But every detail is touched by the spirit of a great enterprise carried out with selfless love. It turns out that Mike Leigh, the profane poet and rough beast of modernism, adores the discipline and brilliance and elaborate jackanapes of the imperial age. Incidentally, and perhaps even inadvertently—and therefore all the more movingly—"Topsy-Turvy" is one of the greatest tributes ever paid to British civilization at its meridian hour. The authentic period lighting produces a glow on the painted stage faces; the fragile beauty of Sullivan's tunes is almost piercing when they are played, as they are here, at slower tempos than we are used to hearing in modern interpretations. In 1884, Gilbert and Sullivan's work hadn't yet become camp. "Princess Ida" and "The Mikado" are comic operas, inspired by the dignity of fully felt theatrical emotion. By honoring that emotion, "Topsy-Turvy" becomes a triumph from start to finish. ♦



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BOOKS

IN CAMERA

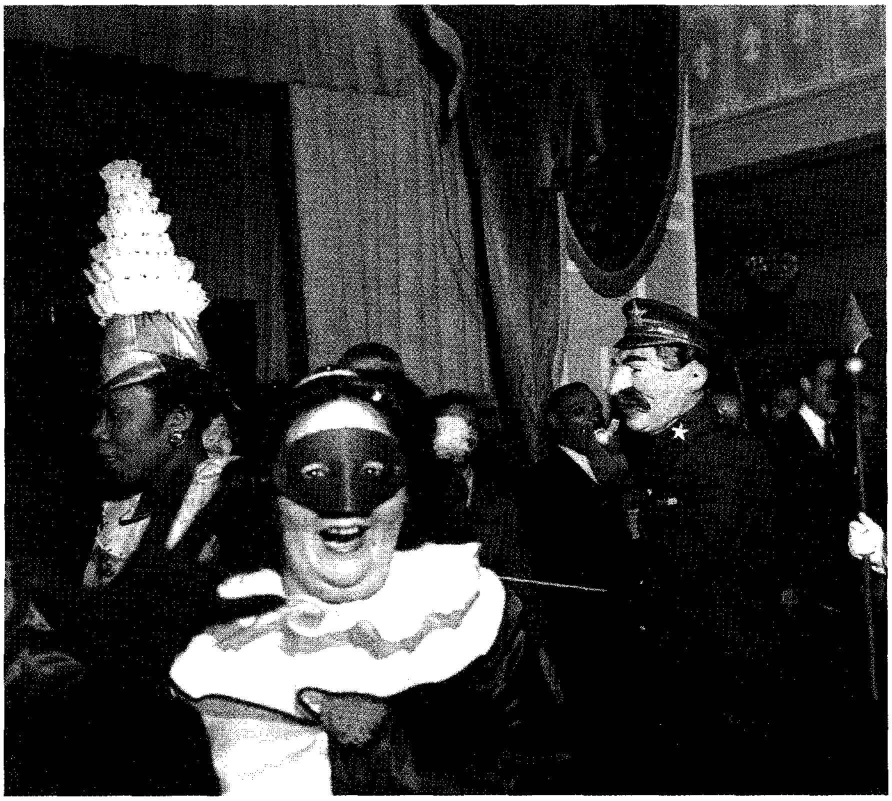
Our century left no secrets.

BY HENRY ALLEN

In these last days of December, 1999, you can't go wrong shaking your head and muttering to the dinner guests, "This has been a terrible, terrible century."

"Indeed," they'll say, eager to share your moral high ground, whether out of grief, horror, guilt, moral superiority, schadenfreude, or outright morbidity. All these attitudes are satisfied in a nearly thirteen-pound headstone of a photograph book whose images make it feel even heavier than it is, like the shroud weight for a burial at sea. From its title, "Century: One Hundred Years of Human Progress, Regression, Suffering and Hope" (Phaidon; $49.95), to its length (eleven hundred and twenty pages), it offers a staggering and chaotic prospect.

Many centuries have been as terrible, in one part of the world or another: war, plague, siege, starvation, persecution, torture, crazed crowds, heaps of bodies, gatherings of foolish, cruel, or doomed officials. But those centuries did not have cameras—particularly the 35-millimetre cameras carried by journalists—recording these events, from start to finish, as "hard news," which is to say the kind that editors believe is reality, and readers honor by storing yellowing newspapers in attics: "BOCHE BAYONET BELGIAN BABIES."



Moments of "hard history" in "Century" include a wartime costume ball (one masked guest is Stalin) at the Waldorf-Astoria, photographed by Weegee.

©WEEGEE/INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY/LIAISON AGENCY

Bruce Bernard, a seventy-one-year-old Fleet Street photo editor and longtime Soho pub figure, edited "Century," and in his preface he expands the hard-news concept into what he calls "hard history." The twentieth century, by his reckoning, happened entirely in public. Unlike the stacks of twentieth-century photohistory rising from the floor of bookstores now, his cache of photographs largely ignores science, art, psychiatry, anthropology, and technology.

In the other century books, the past is prologue. Here it's an epilogue for a lost world of order and light, rendered in the tone of stoic aftermath which has informed the work of so many twentieth-century English declinists, the kind who, in Orwell's words, achieved "the difficult feat of making modern life out to be worse than it is." Sometimes Bernard sounds like an Evelyn Waugh character, summing up his book in the manner of Basil Seal: "Some of the most violent spreads or combinations are, I believe, the best in the book, but others are a bit sickening."

Being a harder historian than Waugh, Bernard delivers not so much decline and fall as just fall. He apologizes that "we found ourselves faced, before 1914, with fewer photographs of historic events and more of such whimsical subjects as elephants' tea parties and Sarah Bernhardt's travels." Then he warns, "I had hoped the clouds would lift just a little in the 1980s and 1990s, but they descended even further."

The book begins with a Eugène Atget picture of an exultant little girl performing on a Paris street, but the caption has a tone of sighing irony. Atget's child, Bernard reports, seems to sense "a brave new century—and not without reason." (In revealing what the child senses, Bernard takes full advantage of the freedoms of Fleet Street—freedoms of supposition, imprecision, and tackiness.) Still, "Century" can't help starting with a flourish of order and light, the late-Victorian era being what it was. Within pages, though, darkness gathers. A "sanguine" German blacksmith is the hegemonic Hun. A squad of American troops in the Philippines foreshadows "future close involvement in the Far East." Japanese soldiers pose with blindfolded Chinese heads they've just lopped off. There's a trench heaped with British soldiers killed by Boers, Oscar Wilde on his deathbed, a black man being strapped into the Sing Sing electric chair as part of "America's relentless modernity"—and we haven't got out of the year 1900 yet.

By my calculation, "Century" provides more than eighty corpse pictures. As the body count mounted, I started lists for rubble, captivity, and squalor, but there were too many overlaps: squalid

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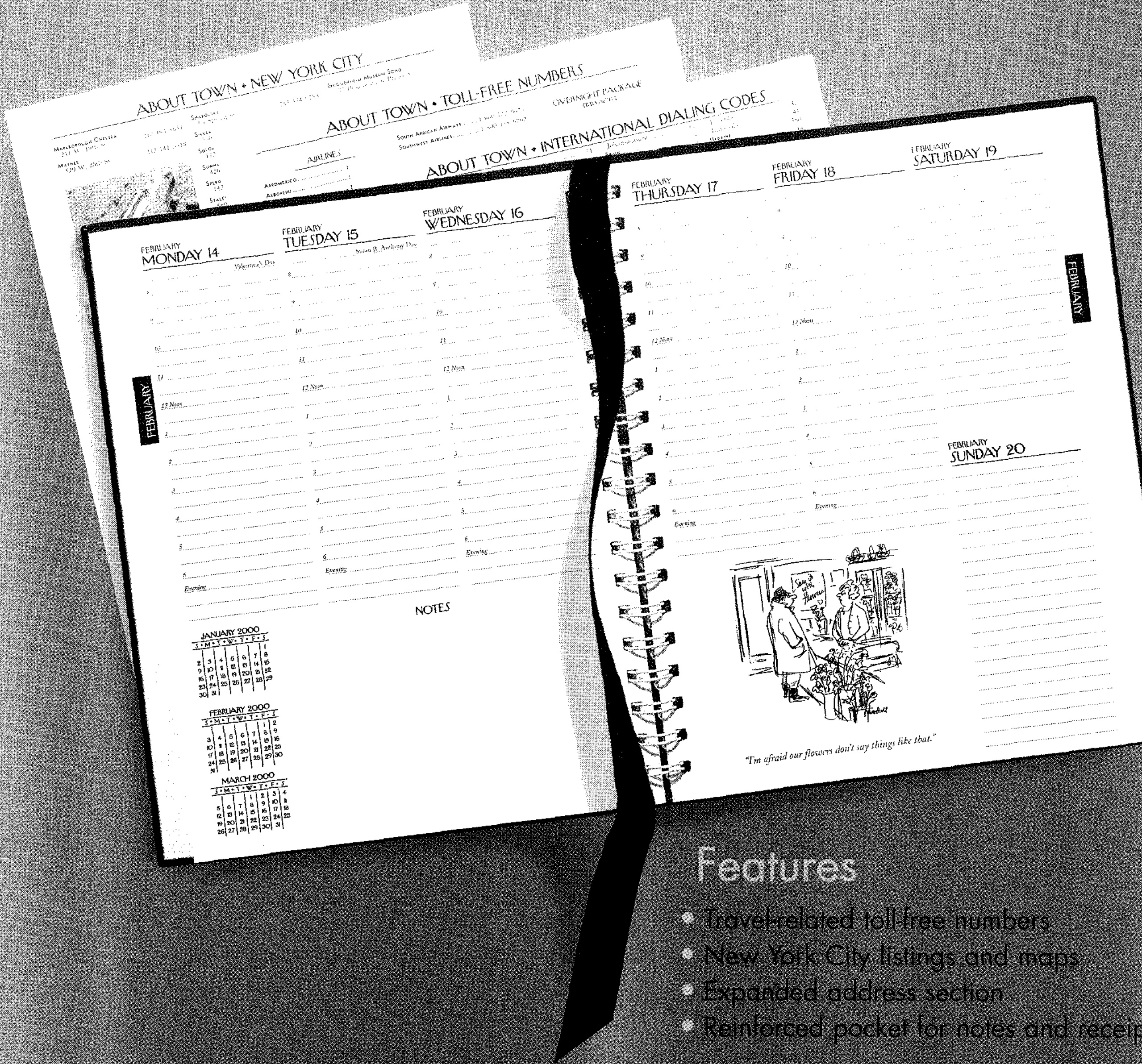
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corpses in rubble, and so on. Terrible, terrible—even many of the movie stills as well. There's Gregory Peck as Ahab lashed to the whale, Death leading a silhouetted procession in "The Seventh Seal," and Christ being crucified behind a collection of movie-set stepladders in "The Greatest Story Ever Told." Sports shots include a pile of muddy Czech gymnasts and the British soccer hooligans whose rioting killed thirty-nine people in 1985.

Bernard came to journalism at about the age of forty, after supporting himself as a painter by pushing around stage scenery and working in construction. He learned an old-timer's contempt for what he calls "artistic" photographs, though he includes some: one of Dorothea Lange's Depression masterpieces, "White Angel Breadline," with its gentle diagonals and hats; Brassai's 1931 picture of two men dancing in a Paris night club; an early Walker Evans of a grimy stevedore in Havana; a horrific Eugene Smith picture of a Klan-robed "Female Spokeswoman for White Superiority."

Bernard explains these selections as "sneaking in a few images from some of the 'master' photographers which would enrich the mixture without slackening the pace or demanding disproportionate attention," and goes on:

> The conscious invocation of nostalgic feeling and the naturally popular "feel good" photograph have been quite deliberately avoided. . . . I have deliberately avoided many, although by no means all, of the famous historical "icons." . . . Something I have also been wary of has been the "award-winning" image, although one or two got in.

This might seem a little like a new curator at the Louvre culling out the Mona Lisa and the Venus de Milo on the ground that, as Bernard puts it, "overuse has made them irritatingly unreal." At the same time, the attempt to make things new through quirkiness can have an effect both comic and disquieting. An oddly jolly picture of F.D.R. signing a declaration of war looks less like a turning point in the struggle against the Axis powers and more like the White House gang planning gag presents for the Vice-President's birthday party. You see dead dogs, not people, at Jonestown; marines huddling by an explosion on Iwo Jima rather than Joe Rosenthal's flag-raising shot; a wounded Lee Harvey Oswald lying on a gurney instead of grimacing as Jack Ruby's revolver fires; and heaped, muddy bodies at a 1994 revival of Woodstock instead of the 1969 original.

Many of the pictures have the look of photo-file orphans, thanks to Bernard's avoidance of images that are artistic, famous, or loved, and yet he manages to include a number of scenes that linger in memory. A felled Tibetan glares at the camera in 1904—four feet away lies a sword. Austrian troops advance over Serbian hills on a sunny day in 1915. Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan exhibit the camaraderie of old actors hired to play foes in the Scopes evolution trial. A Nazi motorcycle squadron crashes through Russian woods. And a truth about the British Empire lurks in a 1954 picture of Sir Evelyn Baring inspecting his "native troops" in Nairobi during the Mau Mau uprising. They wear fezzes and shorts. Baring, a slender man with a slight potbelly and a look of confident impatience, wears a plumed fore-and-aft admiral's hat and epaulettes.

There are just enough errors in the book so that you tend to forgive them all—you can't keep going along grumbling that seventy-three hundred metres isn't twenty-four hundred feet or that the National Guard, and not the police, shot the kids at Kent State. But whatever can Bernard mean when he refers, in a caption, to "the little-known history of the American left"?

Toward the end, color appears more frequently, and the pictures of death, squalor, and rubble lose the quality of accusatory documents and gain a such-is-life fatalism. Hard history becomes sensual experience and a sort of conceptual-art show—a pair of Iranian hands emerging from the earth, a murdered seventeen-year-old Brazilian transvestite lit by candles in a dirt lot, a burning North Sea oil platform, men caged in Siberian work-camp trucks, and Mogadishu fighters, one with a machine gun whose stock is painted an alluring orange. Ragpickers, flaming buses, and guerrillas acquire a combination of warmth and distance. Bloody footprints in the snow of Chechnya become a gorgeous composition. Terrible, terrible. Bernard succeeds in his effort to unsettle. But, finally, there are so few familiar landmarks that you feel a little lost, as if the century you lived in had been a not-quite-parallel world. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

LOST, by Hans-Ulrich Treichel; translated from the German by Carol Brown Janeway (Pantheon; $19). As a young boy, the narrator of this first novel learns that his older brother Arnold did not die of starvation during his family's flight from the Russian Army in 1945; rather, he was handed by their mother to another refugee and lost among the crowds. The narrator has lived in the shadow of his brother's death, and so when he tells us of his mother's obsession with a war foundling who may or may not be Arnold we understand that the "lost" child is also the narrator: precocious, witty, and consumed with guilt for being alive. It may be inevitable that we read this beautifully wrought—and beautifully translated—novel as an allegory of post-Holocaust Germany, but the writing is so lucid that the historical particulars fall away.

IF I TOLD YOU ONCE, by Judy Budnitz (Picador; $24). Death by fire, death by water, and death in battle are just some instances of the bad luck passed down from mother to daughter in this uneven, quirky folk tale that begins in the shtetl and ends, almost a century later, in America. Budnitz is deft at the telling detail (the gift of a jewelled egg from a would-be assailant; bells tied in a young woman's hair while she sleeps) and less good at broad strokes—a brother who literally eats his enemies for dinner is pure "Blackadder."

LOUIS ARMSTRONG IN HIS OWN WORDS: SELECTED WRITINGS, edited by Thomas Brothers (Oxford; $25). It may come as no surprise that Armstrong's literary talents have been overshadowed by his achievements as a musician, but writing was his principal hobby. Travelling with a dictionary, a thesaurus, and a portable typewriter alongside his trumpet, he produced two autobiographies and a steady stream of correspondence, magazine stories, and reminiscences. In this collection, he recounts episodes from his childhood in New Orleans, pays tribute to other musicians, and extolls the virtues of marijuana, laxatives, and rice and beans while speaking candidly about race relations, the music business, and his extramarital affairs. The joy he took in expressing himself on paper is abundantly evident.

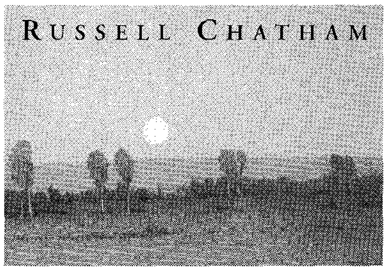
SELECTED LETTERS OF DAWN POWELL, 1913-1965, edited by Tim Page (Holt; $30). In a 1940 letter to Maxwell Perkins, her editor at Scribners, Powell described the characters in her new novel as having "a jovial, openhanded, wisecracking front that is so seldom let down that they themselves aren't sure what's under it." It's a pretty fair description of the author of this literary correspondence as well. Tim Page's artfully annotated selection of Powell's letters—to everyone from Edmund Wilson to Aunt Orpha May, back in Ohio—lays bare many of her triumphs and misadventures, but its darkest moments are almost reflexively transformed by her supple wit. Her 1948 letter firing Carl Brandt, her literary agent, begins, "Dear Carl: can we get a Hollywood divorce and still be frightfully, frightfully good friends? I mean, hold hands in nightclubs and gaze deep into each other's pocketbooks for the photographers?" Powell lived in Greenwich Village for most of her life, and, while she was hard on other places ("I am glad Washington has welcomed you with open tentacles"), she was a soft touch when it came to her chosen home: "Every place else but New York you have to hide all your low beginnings and pretend everybody in the family is white and can read and write and play the harp."

READING RILKE: REFLECTIONS ON THE PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATION, by William H. Gass (Knopf; $25). Neither biography nor literary criticism, this delightful book incorporates both, yet, in an odd way, it's really about love: the author's love for Rilke's work, which led him to try his hand at translating the exquisitely forlorn "Duino Elegies," and Rilke's love for language, women, and the life of the senses—in an early journal, for example, he describes, in great detail, the feeling of a rose petal on an eyelid. Gass, a philosopher, reflects on the linguistic and literary "problems" of translation, but also delivers an engaging portrait of Rilke as a student of the age of doubt.

APPROXIMATELY NOWHERE, by Michael Hofmann (Faber & Faber; $12). As a kind of English Robert Lowell, Hofmann reveals the world to be a tragic, literary place, where one finds "crows sipping from beercans / as if they'd read Aesop." In loosely formal lines, he responds soberly to erotic disappointments and familiar betrayals—a stance that seems designed to preclude melodrama. The strategy works. In this fourth collection, Hofmann has complicated his relationship to his novelist father, Gert Hofmann, who died in 1993; the sadness intrinsic to familial anger pervades a new group of thirteen poems about "*kleiner Papa.*"

AFRICANA, edited by Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Basic Civitas; $100). Ninety years ago, W. E. B. Du Bois announced his intention to edit an encyclopedia that would cover "the chief points in the history and condition of the Negro race." In "Africana," his dream has at last been realized, with essays by leading scholars handsomely displayed and profusely illustrated. In more than two thousand pages, the story of the African continent and of its peoples and their diaspora is explored thoughtfully and sometimes provocatively. The subject is vast, and even here there isn't room for all the entries a reader might like to see, but "Africana" is a colossal achievement. It manages to celebrate the richness of its subject while attending scrupulously to its scholarly duties. Du Bois would be proud.

RUSSELL CHATHAM



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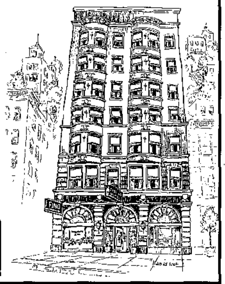

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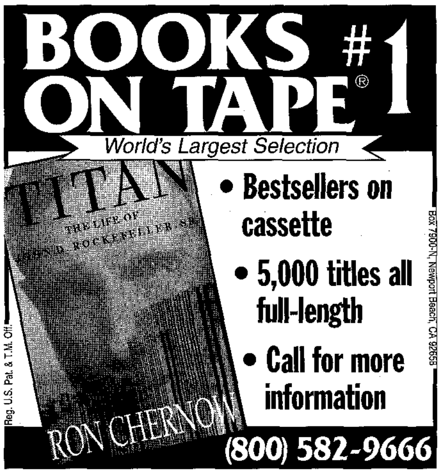

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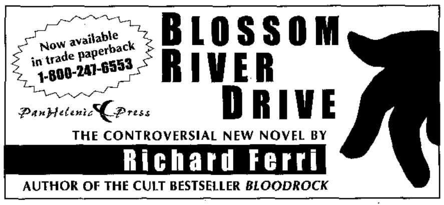

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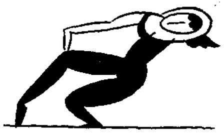


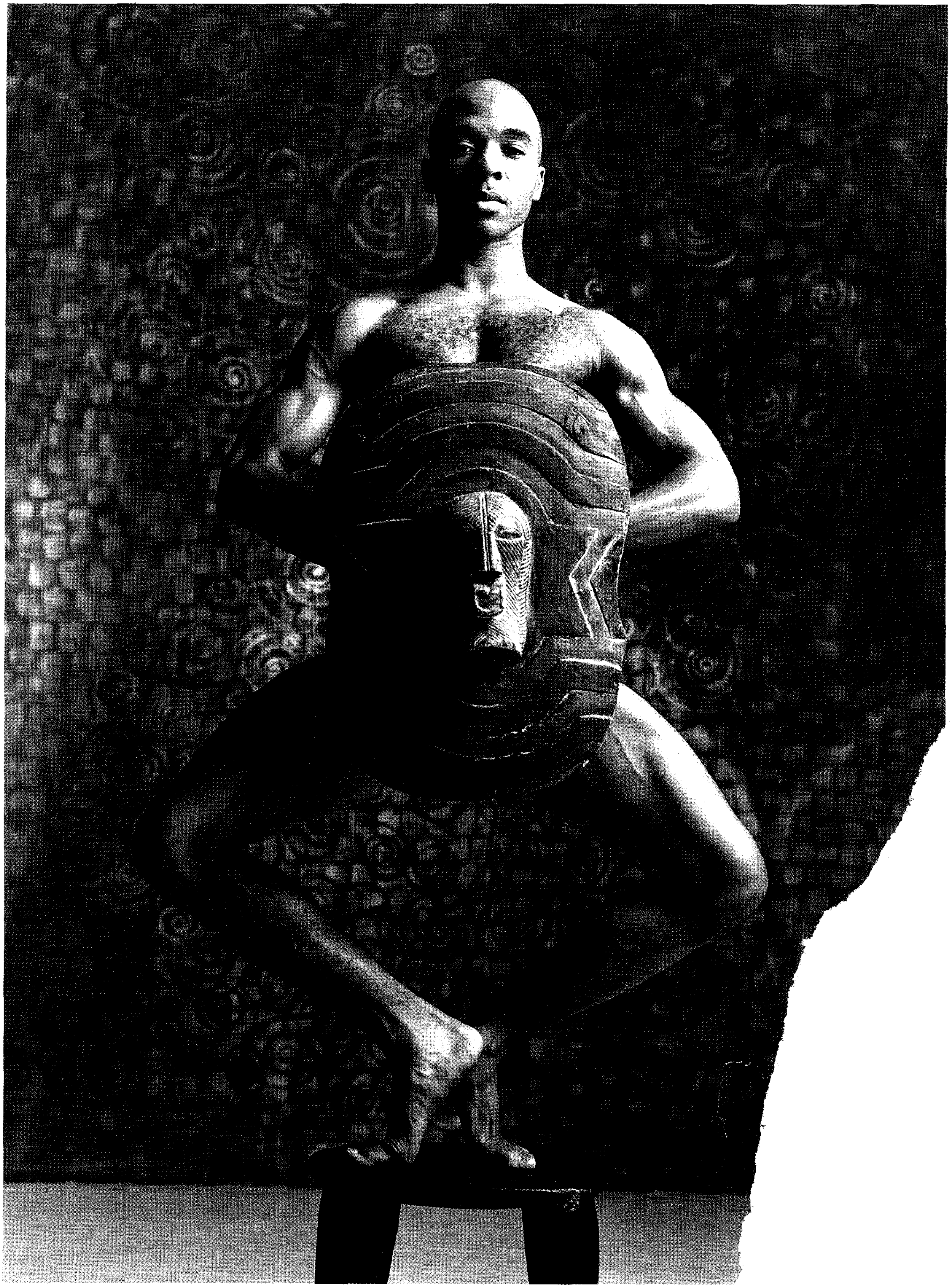
When Judith Jamison, the artistic director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, was notified last September that she was going to receive the Kennedy Center honor, she said that the first thing she thought was how proud Ailey would have been: "I was in tears, looking at Alvin's picture." I think she should have looked in the mirror instead. If anyone wants to know what the director of a dance company does—if anyone still thinks that a dance performance is only as good as its choreography and its performers—that person should go see the Ailey troupe, which will be at City Center for two more weeks. The company is a miracle. All thirty-one dancers seem to be working at the very top of their capabilities. More than that, they are all part of one story, one morality.

It was not always so. Alvin Ailey, a gifted and unhappy man, founded this troupe in 1958, and at the very beginning he had two huge hits, "Blues Suite" (1958) and "Revelations" (1960). In a sense, they were one hit. Ailey grew up, fatherless and poor, during the Depression, in a little dirt town in Texas. On Saturday night, everyone went to the Dew Drop Inn and sinned—that became "Blues Suite." On Sunday morning, they all went to church and repented—that was "Revelations." Having created these two pieces, Ailey never produced much more. Or, rather, he made sixty-eight more dances for the company, but the best of them were variations on those first successes: suite form, with the components of the suite often looking familiar—the frenzy section, the suffering section, the jubilation section.

Not only did his inspiration flag; so did his interest in the company. Again and again, he tried to fold it. The dancers wouldn't let him. By the early eighties, he was deep into drug addiction (cocaine, diet pills, alcohol). He was arrested; he was hospitalized for manic depression. And though he came back, he never again made anything major. Still, the company refused to die. The dancers supplied the energy—in some cases, the choreography. But in the eighties the troupe was looking very ragged, with some performers giving their all, in whatever way they knew how, and others just doing their own thing, putting on personality shows. By the time Ailey died, of complications related to AIDS, in 1989, his company was in serious trouble.

To succeed him, the board of directors chose Jamison. Jamison had joined the company in 1965, and with her big frame, snaking spine, and consummate dance intelligence she soon became its star, its soul—Mother, Priestess, the ground that upheld African-American suffering and strength, Ailey's constant subjects. She had a stormy relationship with Ailey, however, and in 1980, the year he was first hospitalized, she quit. In 1988, she founded a company of her own, the Jamison Project. I saw them when they came to New York that year. None of the choreography was anything much, but the dancing was. You practically jumped out of your seat.

Ditto the current Ailey company. This season marks Jamison's tenth anniversary as director, and she has worked her spell. The dancers are unbelievably strong: huge extensions, rocklike balances, leaps like Japanese calligraphy—everything clean and particular. Two dancers rise above all the others. One is Dwana Adiaha Smallwood, who has finer articulation in her pelvis than I have in my fingers. The other is Matthew Rushing, who is now one of this country's greatest dancers. There seems to be nothing Rushing can't do. In turns in the air, he can go through three different phases—three shapes, each clearly defined—before he remembers about gravity and comes down. In turns on the floor, he can take the leg to three successive heights—see this? now how



Matthew Rushing, of Jamison's inspired troupe, photographed by Anders Over

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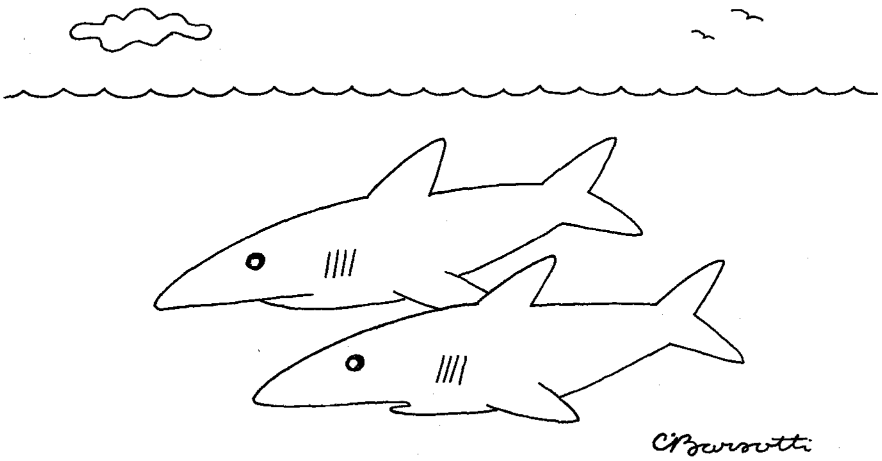
about this?—as he did this season in Ailey's "Pas de Duke," which was made for Mikhail Baryshnikov and Jamison. How many people can do justice to a role created for Baryshnikov?

But what is most touching, and most revelatory of Jamison's genius as a director, is how deep the quality goes. New dancers, regular dancers, people that nobody's making a fuss over, are performing at eight hundred kilowatts. A few nights ago, I saw a dancer—Kevin E. Boseman—do an enormous lateral split leap and then balance on the leg he landed on. (Almost anyone else would have fallen over.) The week before, in the "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel" section of "Revelations," a first-year dancer, Asha Thomas, went into a backbend so deep that I said to myself, "Stop, Asha! You're going to injure your spine." She kept on going until her head almost hit the floor. Then she rose unharmed. Nor should anyone think that these are gratuitous displays. The dance Thomas was doing is about the hope of salvation. The deeper the backbend, the greater the hope.

And the dancers seem to do such things completely naturally, even modestly. No one is hotdogging. They are spontaneous, relaxed, human, and they are wholly inside the dance. Someone has given them to themselves, and that person has to be Jamison. Part of her secret is probably democratic casting. The company has no hierarchy—no principals, soloists, corps—and nonstars are often given starring roles. This is a problem sometimes. (The hair-raising "Sinner Man" section of "Revelations" requires three men of the utmost strength. It does not always get them.) But the policy pays off in commitment, and the stars seem to have adapted. In a new piece this season, Rushing appeared as one of an ensemble of seven men. There he was, in the back row, performing everything with utter concentration, in the finest possible detail. He thought he was doing "Hamlet."

Would that he were. Apart from the superiority of the dancers, the most striking thing about the Ailey company today is the general mediocrity of its repertory. A few extraordinary pieces notwithstanding, the Ailey troupe, for as long as I've watched it, has been better than what it danced. Also, the range of repertory has always been limited, even though Ailey repeatedly commissioned work from outside choreographers. In keeping with his interests and with the civil-rights period, in which the troupe grew up—also, of course, in accordance with the situation of a marginalized people, whose art and history needed to be honored—the dances tended to fall into three categories: the jazz pieces, the religious pieces, and the "roots" pieces, often overlapping. Times have since changed. There is a large black middle class in this country. (Take a look at the color mix in Ailey's audience this year, with seats in the orchestra going for sixty dollars.) Surely these people have something on their minds besides ethnic pride. Yet, year by year, the emphases of the repertory remain the same. Witness the three new works this season: Jawole Willa Jo Zollar's "C# Street—B♭ Avenue," which was about funk and jazz; Donald McKayle's "Danger Run," about African-American history; and Ronald



"I start every diet with the best intentions, but it goes to hell as soon as I sense blood in the water."

K. Brown's "Grace," about grace. Actually, this was a good crop. McKayle's piece, though it looked unfinished, had the clarity typical of him and of his generation, the choreographers of the fifties. Zollar's "C# Street" was pretty much just a romp, but a lovely one, with sensational solos. Brown's "Grace," though it culminated in a lot of moist hugging, was handsomely made, and in its third section, to Afro-pop music by Fela Anikulapo Kuti, it really rocked.

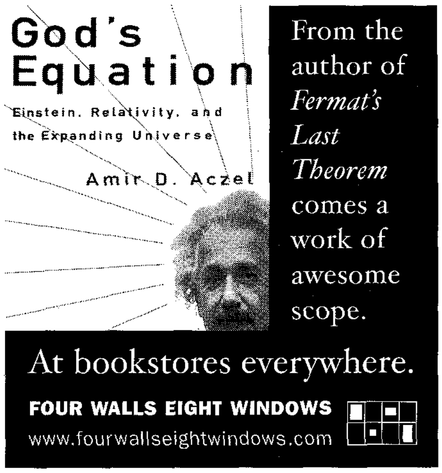
But this is better than the average under Jamison, and on most nights you get a lot of the average, including Jamison's own choreography, which is often corny. There's worse, however. The other night, I saw again last season's "Lettres d'Amour," by the one-named Redha. According to the program notes, Redha is a French-born Algerian-Italian whose teachers included Michael Peters, the choreographer of several Michael Jackson dance videos. You can tell. "Lettres d'Amour" looks like "The Jedi Knights Go to a Whorehouse," and it lasts thirty-five minutes.

A few weeks before the Ailey company opened at City Center, Garth Fagan Dance opened at the Joyce, and it was interesting to see the two side by side, America's most important and second most important black modern-dance troupes. There are clear similarities: lots of jazz, a pervasive religiosity—understated in Fagan, but nonetheless there—and a technique that combines mainstream modern dance with African-based movement. (In Fagan's case, it's Afro-Caribbean; he's from Jamaica.) But in terms of choreography the companies are more different than alike. Sometimes I think Fagan became what he is by deciding that he would not be like Ailey. While Ailey took his idea of modern dance from Lester Horton and Martha Graham—"middle" moderns, from the heroic, here-is-my-soul age, the forties and fifties—Fagan, who was born a decade later than Ailey, seems to have got his from Merce Cunningham, the leader of the next generation, of the choreographers who actually looked modernist: iconoclastic, anti-sentimental. The forces that drove Ailey—humanism, storytelling, the beat—are present in Fagan, but buried, and much of the time he is resisting them. Most obvious is his battle with the beat, a fight not so much with Ailey as with Africanism. For long stretches, the accent of the dancing seems to fall anywhere *but* on the beat. What I hear Fagan saying is "You say we've got rhythm? I'll show you." This intelligent and vexed man had to come along, to build the bridge between black dance and mainstream dance.

But one way in which Fagan's dances do not depart from the Ailey company's is in the calibre of the performing. The dancers are simply tremendous. Again, it's not just a matter of technique. (But boy, what technique!) It's also candor and generosity and faith—faith in themselves, faith in you, that you will understand these often strange, ruminative dances.

The Ailey and Fagan dancers are not the only ones doing fine—they're just the ones doing finest. In my experience, black dancers, on average, are better than white dancers. The baseline is higher. And why would that be? I will not try to resolve the nature-nurture question. Nature may have something to do with it, but the evidence lies with nurture—above all, with religion. In Africa, as far back as we can go, dance was the primary medium of religious expression. Much the same was true in Europe (those Greek tragedies had a lot of dance) until the advent of Christianity, whereupon the church fathers, because of what they saw, rightly, as dance's centrality to the often disgusting and violent religious festivals of the late Roman Empire—and because, of course, the body was involved—threw dance out of religion. Music stayed, painting stayed, and today, therefore, Western music and painting stand on solid ground: several millennia of *daily* work. But the history of dance as an art was broken. It did not begin to revive until the Renaissance, and not until the nineteenth century did professional dancing once again address matters of the soul directly.

Among Africans, so far as historians can tell us, no such break between dance and the soul ever occurred, even after the journey to the New World. Dance remained a primary artistic language, one that addressed the deepest questions. And if today religion is sometimes associated with sentimentality in black companies, it is also a source of strength. Black dancers dance beautifully, I think, because lives are on the line. ♦



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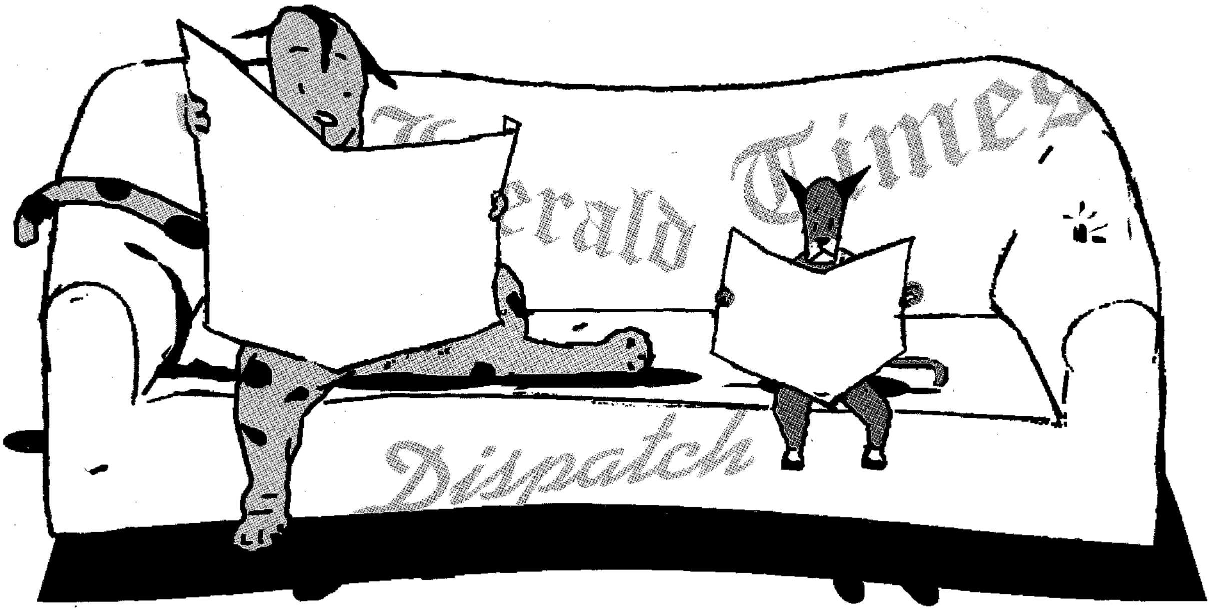

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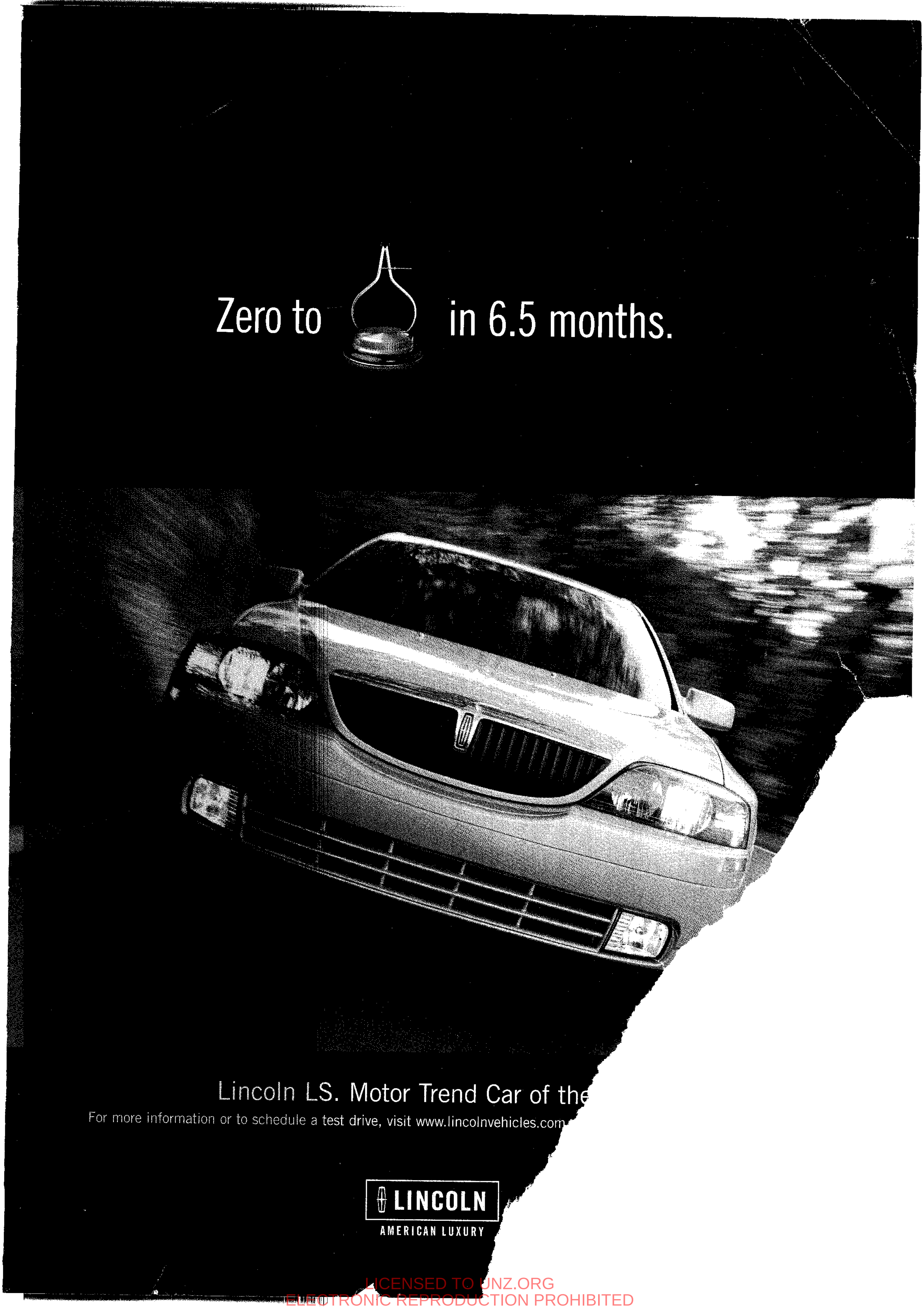

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